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Alapaha, the Squaw; OR, The Renegades of the Border.

BY FRANCIS JOHNSON,
AUTHOR OF "THE GOLD GUIDE," "THE DEATH
TRACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE chill storms of early spring had given place to sweet May; blossoms and flowers were springing up through the layer of yellow leaves which thickly strewed the ground, checkered here and there, with bright green patches of grass; thousands of blossoms decked the branches of the low dogwood and locust trees; buds and tendrils hung from the luxuriant vines, that wound from trunk to trunk, transforming the wilderness into a garden, and diffusing their sweet odor through the vast dome, overarched by the spreading tops of gigantic pines, oaks, and sassafras trees. It is true the rays of the sun found a scanty passage through the dense foliage of the huge old trunks, yet this maze of creeping plants and vines suffered but a few scattered beams to reach the earth, and twilight prevailed in this portion of the forest, although the orb of day already shone high in the heavens. The men who were reclining at the foot of a mighty pine, seemed well satisfied with this gloom, for one of them stretched his limbs complacently, and casting a glance aloft, to the green and leafy vault above them, said:

"A glorious place this for our purpose! a most capital place! it seems made for it. The cane-brake between here and the La Fave will certainly hinder any reasonable Christian from making his way in that direction, and the thorns and green briars yonder are not so very tempting, that a man would be likely to venture in without an object, and it would be without an object, Weston, for we have taken good care, I think, that no game harbors here."

The speaker, so far as

could be judged from his posture, for he lay comfortably extended upon the dense bed of leaves which covered the ground, seemed to be a man over six feet in height; his frame was muscular, his features frank and open; his eyes, however, wore an expression of gloomy wildness, and roamed, restlessly, from place to place, while his whole exterior betrayed a high degree of negligence as to matters of attire. His old, ragged felt hat, had fallen from his head, displaying his tangled and bushy hair; his bristling beard looked as if it had not been touched by a razor for a full week, and his threadbare hunting-shirt of blue cotton, which was adorned with remnants of fringe, that had once been yellow, was stained with spots of blood, both old and recent, a fact sufficiently explained by the freshly-removed and still bleeding deer-skin which lay at his side; his lower limbs were incased in leathern leggings or spatterdashes, that were covered with

patches, and a pair of cow-skin shoes completed his somewhat comfortless attire.

His companion, who was seated near him, with his back leaning against the trunk of the pine, and was whittling a piece of wood with a long knife, commonly known by the name of an "Arkansas toothpick," was to be distinguished, and advantageously indeed, from his rude neighbor, for his apparel was somewhat neater, his leathern hunting-shirt, which, though old and well-worn, seemed to have been made with peculiar care, was in a tolerable state of preservation, and his whole appearance intimated that he had received a better education than the wild denizen of the forest, or, at least, that he had more recently left the roof of his parents, a supposition rendered quite probable by his youth, as he could scarcely have numbered seventeen summers.

The third was totally unlike the two men just described, and if these displayed too much rudeness and vivacity of manner, the former seemed desirous to compensate for it by mildness and affability. To judge from his apparel, he belonged to the class of substantial farmers; a blue coat made of fine woolen stuff, pepper-and-salt colored pantaloons, a neat yellow vest, carefully-blackened shoes, a new hat, all proved that he prided himself somewhat upon his exterior, and although he harmonized in many points with the company in which he now found himself, and to which he evidently seemed to belong, yet he was far from sharing in their contempt for clean and suitable attire. He stood leaning with one leg crossed over the other, against a small oak, gazing thoughtfully at the speaker, who, after the observation above mentioned, dropped his head lazily again upon the moss that clothed the roots of the tree.

"Or, rather take good care for that now, more than ever, Cotton," he said, in a somewhat nasal tone, in reply to the hunter's remark, "although you scarcely do right to roam around, without pressing need, upon the holy Sabbath, destroying harmless beasts of the wood."

"Enough of preaching!" cried the hunter, in a tone between vexation and mockery, while his



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ALAPAH, THE SQUAW.

younger companion cast a scornful glance upon the reprobate, "save your morality until you are in the settlement, but spare us the trash here. But what can keep Rush? D—n me, if I can understand it; he promised to be here at sunrise, and the sun is now three hours high—may lightning blast him!"

"You will never bring him here with your blasphemous curses," replied the farmer, shaking his head. He then continued somewhat more warmly: "But he does stay very long; at ten I must be at the prayer-meeting, and I have six good miles to ride to get there."

"The two trades seem to agree very well in you," said the hunter, with a scornful laugh. "Preaching and horse-stealing suit right well together, and can be carried on without interfering with each other, for the Sabbath, as you call it, is a poor day for our business; but, by the horned devil, lay aside your fooleries here in the wood, where, between ourselves, they are, to say the least, tiresome."

"Well, don't be uneasy, I will no longer annoy you with them," said the farmer, smiling, while he carefully took a pinch of snuff from a shell box. "But look," he added, hastily and eagerly, "your dog pricks up his ears—he must scent something."

A gray and black striped hound, which lay curled together a few steps distant, upon the only sunny spot, where an aperture, left by a fallen trunk, and not yet obstructed by the branches of the neighboring trees, admitted the warm sunbeams, raised its nose carefully, snuffing the wind for a moment, uttered a low growl, made a feeble attempt to wag its tail, and then sunk back into its former posture of repose. Its master, who had carefully watched the movements of the dog, now started up with a glance of satisfaction, and cried:

"At last, then, he comes! and it's time. Dick knows him well enough, too; he won't get up, though, for he has a warm and comfortable berth of it in the little spot of sunshine there. But, hollo! ab, here he is! Well, Rush, you must think we find it very comfortable here among the mosquitoes and the woodticks! what the deuce has kept you so long?"

The new-comer was a man of middle age, and like the farmer, whose name was Rawson, was cleanly and neatly dressed; like the hunter, however, although he was not in other respects clothed in hunting garb, he carried a powder-horn and a pouch for balls at his right side and a long rifle upon his shoulder.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, addressing himself to each in turn, "good morning! excuse me for being late—but—I couldn't help it; that young coxcomb, Brown, and old Harper, with the d—d red-skin, crossed my way, and I didn't want them to see me turn in this direction. The fellows, indeed, are growing too sharp-sighted, and the sneaking scalping-knife is continually snuffing around in the wood. The d—l! why do we suffer the Indian in the neighborhood here? I have a sort of presentiment that the ball is already cast that will put a stop to his devilries. But, Cotton," he added, turning moodily to the hunter, "I wish you would never call me by that confounded name—you will out with it yet before strangers, and then there will be the d—l to pay—call me Johnson—even when we are by ourselves—you will then get accustomed to it."

"Just as you say," cried the latter, laughing, "I don't care—Rush or Johnson—you will no more escape the rope than the rest of us; but we will be true as long as we remain together; and now, to business, for, in the last two weeks we haven't made a single cent; it is time that we set about something."

With these words he took a small bottle of whisky from his woolen jacket, drew the cork, nodding, with a smile, to Rawson, and then uttering the words, "Your health," he placed it with an air of satisfaction to his lips. When he had assuaged his thirst, with a long draught, he reached the bottle to Rawson, and cried:

"Here! strengthen yourself for your morning's discourse, you'll need it. D—n me! if it wouldn't take three such bottles to give me courage to listen quietly to it, and even then, I should bargain for permission to fall asleep before you began."

"I thank you," said Rawson, in a friendly tone, as he waved aside the proffered draught. "I am much obliged to you—I must not smell of whisky this morning—pass the bottle to Johnson, he is casting longing glances at it."

"There is nothing better in the morning than a stiff glass of whisky," said the last-comer, while, without further ceremony, he put the

bottle to his lips. "But, Weston," he continued, turning to the youngest of their number, "what is the matter with you? you are scratching as if you were trying to strip off your skin, like a snake; has a mosquito bit you?"

"A mosquito!" said the young man, in a tone of vexation, as he stepped forward, and took the bottle from Johnson's hand, a mosquito? the air here is full of them, and it almost seems to me as if Harper was right when he said lately, that there were so many of these sharp stinging fellows in this part of the country, that if a man at table but cuts the air with his knife, he has his plate full of wings and legs."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Cotton, "you will soon get used to it; you are fresh from the Missouri hills, where, as I have heard say, a man can sleep at night in the open air, without a fire; here, he would find it harder work than maulin' rails."

"Gentlemen, remember what has brought us here," said Rawson, somewhat impatiently; "time flies, and I really must be gone; besides, this spot, after all, is not so very safe, if Johnson has seen the Indian and his comrades sneaking around in the neighborhood; I propose, therefore, that we proceed without delay to work, and settle matters."

"Well said, great prophet!" cried Cotton, clapping his heavy hand upon the speaker's shou'der, while the latter drew his face away, and cast a malicious glance at the hunter; stifling his anger, however, with a great effort, he looked gravely around in the face of each, and continued:

"Thanks to the busy knaves who roam around, not only in this settlement, but in the whole county, nay, in the whole State, and style themselves, 'Regulators,' we have for many weeks lain idle, and have not earned a penny. Yesterday, as you all know, a messenger came from the island with an order for a lot of good horses, and here we sit and lay our hands in our laps. This can not go on much longer—I need money—and so does each of you, and to toil the year through, raising corn and hogs to earn what, as you may say, lies on the table before us, is ridiculous; let us to work then! As, owing to the good name which I have succeeded in obtaining, although I am, in truth, only a feeble, sinful mortal—"

"Holla! stop that nonsense!" cried Cotton, angrily, stamping upon the earth; "gabble your pious rigmarole at Roberts's, but here speak plainly."

"As, owing to the good name which I have succeeded in obtaining," repeated Rawson, with a soothing gesture toward Cotton, "I am well received in many, very many farm-houses, this has, naturally, given me the opportunity to become accurately acquainted with the number of cattle and especially horses, owned by the proprietors; in my opinion, therefore, there is no more profitable quarter for us than Spring Creek, on the other side of the Petit-Jean. Hatfield, there, has a number of fine animals, and I am certain that we can snap up eight horses from his farm alone, and I guaranty that we shall have two days' start of our pursuers."

"Not so bad," said Johnson, "but reflect, that brings us almost fifty miles further from the Mississippi."

"Five-and-thirty at most," replied Rawson, "and two days and two nights' start. Here, in this part of the country, they are upon our track in an hour, and that is, to say the least, uncomfortable."

"What if we should defer the affair till next week?" said Johnson. "I should like to take a little excursion to the Washita."

"Not an hour," cried Rawson; "why waste time, when we have so little to spare?"

"And what the d—l puts you in such a hurry, all of a sudden?" exclaimed Cotton, in astonishment; "you are not, usually, so very ready."

"I want money," said Rawson, briefly; "my land has been surveyed, and if, by the first Monday in July, I do not pay in full the sum, it may be sold, as you well know, under my very nose, and there are some worthy souls hereabouts in the country, who would take great delight in doing me this kindness. There is, among others, this Mr. Harper—the d—l seize him!"

"Ha, Rawson! if Mrs. Roberts heard you call upon the d—l to seize a Christian man, her good opinion of you would suffer a sad shock."

"Laugh, laugh, Cotton! you have earned the right to do so, it is your daily bread, but if I do not say with truth, that there are some men living hereabouts whose throats I would like—but that has nothing to do with this affair," he continued, quickly controlling himself; "speak! will you follow my advice or not? In eight days we can make three hundred dollars apiece, and that is more than a man can earn, fairly and honestly, in six months."

"Well, I'm agreed," cried Cotton, "but this time you two must go; the last time Weston and I risked our necks."

"Yes, yes," said Weston, "it's true—and we came mighty near being caught—this time it's your turn."

"Stop! stop! not so fast!" cried Johnson, interrupting him, "we must first arrange as to the plan, and then you two should consider the trouble we had with the sale, and that I am not yet entirely free from suspicion. Let us hear the plan first, then—how have you arranged it, Rawson?"

"Well, listen!" replied the latter, drawing a long bowie-knife from beneath his waistcoat, and beginning to whittle upon a piece of wood, "two of us—we must in no case be more, that we may not excite suspicion, if we should accidentally be seen—two of us, I say, will go with our rifles, and each man provided with three or four bridles, which he must contrive to conceal about him, from here across the Petit-Jean, toward the mill on Spring creek. I mention the bridles, that we may not have the trouble we had last time, in selling the horses, when the green bark had cut the beasts' mouths so badly, that the men on the island refused to give us their fair value. It is but a short distance from the mill to Hatfield's, a couple of miles at most, and when you come to the first fence corner, take the first footpath to the left; it seems to run into the wood again, but it runs so, only to avoid a few fallen oaks; afterward, it turns again toward the farm, and leads directly to the lot where the horses are kept, which lies at the further side of the house. Hatfield has about seven-and-twenty horses, counting foals and all, eight of which he usually fudders. But these we must not touch, for he would miss them the very next morning, and he is too old a hunter not to find our track; the rest graze in the open fields, with a young three-year-old stallion."

"He has no business to let the animal run at large, at this time of the year," said Johnson, interrupting him.

"I know that well enough," said Rawson, "but he does; at present, at least, I am sure the beast is running in the fields, and he comes regularly every evening to the fence of the barnyard, neighs, and trots around a while, and then returns to his usual sleeping-place in the wood. The whole troop follow him, and that is the moment to secure them, for Hatfield's people do not pay much attention to the beasts; I have stopped there twice, to make sure of it."

"If we could take the mares from the barnyard," said Weston, laughing, "we should have the whole herd, and might ride as fast as the animals could travel."

"Yes, the next morning have ten or a dozen men with their rifles and bowie-knives after us, and on a trail that a blind man could follow with his stick," cried Rawson. "No, no, we must go safely to work, for it is not only necessary that we should not be caught, but we must avoid all suspicion. Now we can do this, only by setting about the business with the utmost prudence. Those who are to steal the horses must not let themselves be seen at the mill; there are almost always some of Hatfield's people down there, and the faces from the La Fave, mine perhaps, excepted, do not stand in very good repute in the northern settlements. The best plan will be to keep on straight to the spot, where the road runs along by Spring creek, and wade through the water to the other side; this is advisable for two reasons: in the first place, it would mislead any stranger who might chance to see you, for he would think you were going across to Dardanelle; in the next, you will be far less likely to meet with an acquaintance, than if you kept on upon the high-road. By the corner of the fence, just where the path turns off to the left, the ground is uncommonly rocky, and a track can hardly be remarked there. What is afterward to be done, when you are once on the spot, I need not tell you, you know that well enough."

"But who is to go?" muttered Cotton, moodily; "you are as careful in giving us directions as if you were not to be of the party; we ran the risk the last time, and it's but right and reasonable that you two should venture your necks now."

"And then, you are so well acquainted with the country there!" cried Weston, "the rest of us, who know it only from description, would lose too much time."

"You are right—right in many respects," said Rawson, with a smile; "but, young man, Johnson and I, as he said, suffered even more anxiety, and were exposed to more danger the last time, than you two, who only stole the horses. But agreed—I consent to be one, do you decide upon the other; but only on condition that I am bound to take the stolen beasts no further than the Mamelle, that is to say, to the mountain ridge that separates the waters of the Mamelle from the La Fave; we will meet the source of the creek, which flows out below, into the great salt lick, and from there, the other two must take them to the island."

"It were best, then, that you and Johnson should undertake the first part of the business; Weston and I will then see to the rest."

"Hold, there!" cried Johnson, "I don't much care to go upon the grounds of that knave, Hatfield—you don't know, perhaps, that we had a fight together a fortnight ago, and that I—my confounded pistol missed fire, and the rascal knocked me down. I owe the fellow a dose for it"—he added, grinding his teeth—"but, I had rather not settle the affair on his own land; it would tell against me, if the matter came before the court. No, let luck decide who shall go; we can draw straws."

What! straws?" grumbled Cotton. "No, let the chase decide the matter. Early to-morrow morning we will all four, or all three, rather, since this time Rawson volunteers, start upon different grounds and return here by Thursday morning. The one that shoots the fewest deer to-morrow, or has the poorest luck, generally, is to go with him."

"Good!" exclaimed Rawson, "that is a capital idea, and I will accompany you, if it is only for the sport."

"Well agreed," said Johnson, "we are all good hunters; let luck decide which of us has to convey horseflesh on this or that side of the Mamelle; early to-morrow morning, then! But we must each fix upon a range, or we might beat upon one another's track. I, for my part, will go up the river a piece and hunt on the low lands."

"You come then on my ground," said Weston. "I'm bound to take that direction, for my tent is up there with blanket, cooking utensils and two deerskins."

"Well, then, I'll cross over to the Petit-Jean; Jones, who lives near the stream, told me yesterday that he had seen lots of tracks."

"I am going in that direction, too," said Rawson, "but I shall not be able to hunt all day, as I have promised Mrs. Laughlin to come over in the evening and hold a prayer-meeting."

"And where will you leave your rifle in the meanwhile?" said Johnson, laughing.

"Why, at the widow Fuller's, I think; and as I ride home in the evening I can stop and get it."

"Rawson! Rawson!" cried Cotton, laughing, and shaking his finger at him, "that business with the widow Fuller seems to me rather suspicious. You are all the while sneaking and fawning around the woman; and when I lately came so unexpectedly to your prayer-meeting, you two were kneeling most confounded close to each other."

"Nonsense!" said Rawson.

"And," continued Cotton, pertinaciously, "when she began to jump and scream and sing, she didn't fall until she knew that she was close alongside of you, and Mr. Rawson naturally picked her up, that she might receive no further damage. Oh, Rawson!"

"Nonsense!" repeated Rawson. He seemed somewhat confused, however, and turning quickly to Weston, exclaimed—"By the by, young man, you must not count the two skins you have already in your tent."

"Of course not," replied Weston, "fair play! early to-morrow morning, then, as soon as it is light enough to see the sight upon a rifle!"

"It is time to break up," said Rawson, thrusting his hands into his pockets; "so then, gentlemen, good-by until we meet, and a merry meeting may it be."

"Stop! one thing more," cried Cotton, as Rawson turned to go toward the outside of the thicket, where he had fastened his horse, "we mustn't separate until we have come to a clear understanding as to what we shall do in case the cursed Regulators come upon our tracks. The d—l if I had my way not one of the rascals should be alive at this time to-morrow morning."

Rawson turned, stepped near Cotton, and stood for a moment silent, biting his nails. "I had almost forgotten to tell you a piece of news," he said, at last, while he cast a side glance upon his sturdy neighbor. "But now that you speak of the Regulators, it comes to my mind again."

"And what is it?" asked Johnson, quickly.

"Why, nothing more nor less, than that the sheriff of Pulaski county has a warrant in his pocket, for the arrest of our friend Cotton here."

"The d—l!" cried the latter, "and for what?"

"Oh, I don't know that anything very particular was mentioned; there were various matters. I heard something said of a fifty-dollar bill, and of a promise of marriage in Randolph county, and of a man who was missed for a while, and whose body was afterward found in the Petit-Jean, and several trifles of this sort."

"The d—l!" cried the hunter, stamping his foot, "and it was this that you almost forgot? And you would have let me ride quietly into the settlement! But it's time for me to be off—Arkansas is growing a little too warm for me, or rather, I am making too many acquaintances here."

"You are pretty widely known, then?" said Rawson, smiling.

"Very," replied the hunter, who had now grown thoughtful, and scarcely heard the question. "But what of it all?" he added, raising his head, "what of it all? In a few days our business here will be ended, and with the money I can go down the Mississippi, and from there easily get to Texas."

"Why don't you go from here by land? It wouldn't cost you a cent, and it's not the tenth part of the distance."

"True, true, but I have my reasons for not venturing so near the Indians, that live to the northward."

"Oh, yes, Cotton—tell us the story," cried Weston. "I have heard so much said about it, and I should really like to know the truth of the matter; what was the difficulty between you and Cherokee?"

"A nice time this to be telling stories!" grumbled Cotton.

"They say," cried Rawson, laughing, "that your arm still bears the marks of an iron."

"Go to the d—l with your foolery! we have something else to do at present; they are not aiming at me alone, but at all of you—the Regulators have got wind of us through some rascal, and they are upon our traces."

"Not upon mine," said Rawson, laughing, "no one thinks of looking for the wolf in the pious and God-fearing Methodist preacher."

"No one?" cried Cotton, with a scornful laugh, "no one! What was it Heathcote said lately, when he called you a rogue and a liar?"

Rawson's face changed color, and a death-like pallor chased the red hue from his cheeks; his hand reached, convulsively, toward the handle of his knife, which he wore carefully concealed beneath his waistcoat.

"What sort of accusations did he bring against you?" continued the hunter, in a low voice, stepping nearer to Rawson, who trembled with rage and fury. "Ha! didn't the w—d horse-thief sl'p out? And you took it all quietly. Pah! I was ashamed of you; by my soul, I was ashamed of you!"

"Cotton," replied Rawson, with difficulty controlling himself, "you have touched the right string—that man is dangerous; he has an idea who I am, but he has lately let fall some suspicious words about Atkins."

"What! Atkins? Why he has never yet had a band in a theft, and only quietly assists us on his farm."

"Yes, Atkins. The d—l only knows what put it into the knave's head to squint in that direction, but it's a fact; and when I put up with the words rogue and liar, I had very good reasons for it. Had I blazed out—I, a preacher—and given it back to the rascal!"

"He would have knocked you down."

"It would have given a sad blow to my usual devout walk and calling," continued

Rawson, without suffering himself to be disturbed.

"A sad blow, indeed," said Cotton, "on the head, or between the eyes."

"To the d—l with your wrangling," exclaimed Johnson. "We are not here to listen to such folly; Rawson was perfectly right; if he preaches, he must behave like a preacher."

"And steal horses," cried the incorrigible Cotton, with a burst of laughter.

"Are you willing to consider a serious business seriously or not? Speak! for I am tired of your trifling," cried Rawson, angrily. "We are here to act in common for the common good, and not to quarrel. I know even more—the Regulators will meet here to-day or tomorrow."

"Here! where?" exclaimed all, in a breath.

"At Roberts's, or Wilkins's, or some one else's—how can I tell? but that they are coming is certain, and then—they intend to enforce sweet Lynch law again."

"They can't do that," cried Cotton. "Stricter laws have been passed, to set aside all excuse for it."

"What can't they do, here in Arkansas?" said Rawson, smiling, "when twenty, or five-and-twenty, join together, and are in earnest? Do you think the Governor will send out troops against them? No, indeed—and if he did, it would help the matter but little; they can do every thing that they seriously resolve upon, and they have resolved to root us out. (I do not speak of our quiet, friendly, social circle.) I mean our like and kind, that their horses may come home in the evenings, in full number, and that they need no longer lie in wait for people who carry a bowie-knife, a pair of pistols, and a light snaffle bridle or two under their jackets."

"To speak seriously, I cannot blame them for it so very much," said Johnson, "but as it by no means sorts with our views of life—What is the matter with the beast yonder? He has been lifting his head very strangely for the last minute or two—can any one be coming?"

"No, it's nothing," said Cotton, casting a side-glance at the dog, who had now quietly crouched to the ground again—he got scent of a prairie-hen, maybe."

"As this does not sort with our views of life," resumed Johnson, "we must have recourse to force or cunning. For force, we are too weak, for when the business gets to be serious, there are but few who will stand by us; therefore, cunning is the word, and I think that with Atkins's help, who could not live in a better place, we can lead them all around by the nose, even if they have this proud and stupid Heathcote for their leader."

"Heathcote their leader!" cried Rawson, with a start.

"Yes; at least, so Harper told me lately, when I met him at the mill."

"These must be the last horses that we take from this neighborhood," muttered Rawson, thoughtfully—"it is growing dangerous. The next, I think, we will get from Missouri; Weston is at home there, and I myself am well known on Big Black, and in the neighborhood of Farmington."

"Known?" asked Cotton.

"To be sure," replied the other, determined not to understand the malicious sense of these words, "known, and the people there are all friendly to me, on account of my devout life."

"The horses, too," said Weston, laughing. "When he left there, three fine beasts followed him, out of pure attachment."

At these words, Rawson joined in with the laughter, which followed this observation, but he became at once serious again, and cried:

"Gentlemen, this must have an end; remember we risk our necks upon the game; everything has its time, jest and earnest—listen, then, to my plan. I have reflected upon the matter, and have changed my opinion. We will not take the horses in a direct line to the island; it's possible that, in spite of all our cunning, they might light upon our tracks, and that would not only bring danger upon us, but upon the river people likewise; wait for me, therefore, on the La Fave, about a mile above the place where Haswell's canoe is tied, where the canebrake begins. Starting from there, I have a plan that will lead our pursuers a fine chase, while we shall get off in safety. I will set them upon a false track, and that can be done only at the river. But I will tell you more about it by-and-by; we must first see to

whom the lot falls to-morrow, and I will then arrange it with him."

"But if they pursue us to Atkins's, and so discover our last hiding-place?" said Cotton, with an air of distrust.

"Perhaps we need not go to Atkins's at all," cried Rawson, laughing. "I have lived long enough in the woods, to know how to lead a few barking hounds from the track; but settle among yourselves who is to go with me; let the other two be punctual at the aforesaid place, and may I never be called Rawson again, if I do not keep my word!"

"That is a big oath," said Cotton; "in a few weeks you would, perhaps, give, God knows what, if your name was not Rawson. Well, I have, at least, the consolation of knowing that I run no greater risk than the rest of you. But now, let us vow not to betray each other, in danger or in death. If one of us proves a traitor, with a look or with a breath, the rest swear to take vengeance upon him, let him fly where he may, were it into the arms of his mother."

"I swear it—a bloody death to the traitor!" cried Weston, tearing his broad knife from its sheath; "may his arm and tongue wither, and may he be struck with blindness!"

"I swear it!" said Johnson.

"And I!" said Rawson, "but I hope the oath will be unnecessary to bind us firmly and closely together. Mutual interest does it now, and this holds tighter than all oaths and pledges; if this state of things should happen to change, I should wish myself in Texas."

"You don't think that one of us could be base enough to betray his friends?" cried Weston, hotly; "the mere thought is treason and perjury to our compact."

"Well, well, I am very willing to believe that you mean honestly, Weston," said Rawson, reaching him his hand; "but you are still young, very young, and you do not know the straits into which a man may fall."

"Torture itself should not force an answer from me, that—"

"I am delighted to hear that these are your sentiments; but now, good-by, gentlemen—good-by, Johnson—where do we meet to-morrow morning for the hunt?"

"Where Setter's creek runs from the upland. A group of walnut-trees grows near by, upon a little hight—"

"I know the spot."

"Well, there, then! and now, good luck! but don't preach so very movingly to the poor people!"

"And the widow," said Cotton, calling after him. But Rawson no longer heard him, he had already disappeared in the surrounding thicket, the twigs of which closed together again behind him.

Cotton gazed after him for a while in silence; at last, without uttering a word, he threw his rifle across his shoulder and turned to depart.

"You don't quite trust Rawson?" said Johnson, glancing sharply upon him.

"No! to speak the truth honestly, I do not! Who would trust the sneaking fellow, when you see him put up with the most shameful insults? The man hates Heathcote as he hates sin—stop! that isn't the word—as he hates goodness, I should say, and still I saw how they made up the quarrel; Rawson went up to Heathcote, shook him by the hand, and declared he bore him no ill will. May I be hacked in pieces alive, if I could have done that! the rascal should have had my knife, not my hand. But never mind, his interest binds him to us, and I think that's enough; at any rate he could gain nothing by betraying us, for there is no price set upon my head: Hal ha! ha! the lawyers think to catch old Cotton, in the woods. They'll find it hard, and in truth, it couldn't be done, except by treachery."

"You have too bad an opinion of Rawson," said Johnson. "He has his faults, of course; we all have them; but he is true, and I am convinced that the Regulators might flay him alive before they could force the name of a friend from his lips."

"And if they did, it would trouble him to prove that I am one of his friends," said Cotton, laughing. "But, good by, Johnson. You mean honestly, I know, and a man can depend upon you in case of need—good by! in a few days we shall meet here, and if we have then a couple of hundred dollars or so in our pockets, we can lead a safer and pleasanter life of it. There are many here in the settlement, who now open their mouths awful wide, and scream

about sin and theft, but lay a five-dollar bill upon their lips, and they will be whist as mice. Well, good-by, a merry meeting, and soon."

The men now separated. Cotton and Weston walked together toward the bank of the river, but Johnson turned in a northward direction, through the bushes, crossed the county road, and disappeared amid the steep and pine-clad hills that rose beyond it.

The rendezvous of the "Horsedealers," as they called themselves, now lay quiet and deserted, in Sabbath stillness. For about a quarter of an hour this silence was unbroken, except by the slight chirping of the squirrel, and the cheerful cry of the jay; then the bushes were pushed aside, though without the slightest noise, and the dark form of an Indian stepped forth upon the lonely spot.

He listened cautiously in all directions before he ventured into the open space—like a deer, which, stepping from the gloom of the forest, is about to cross a path, and glances first on all sides to see if danger threatens it; he then glided noiselessly onward, with his eyes fixed upon the ground; soon observing, doubtless, the many footprints around, he paused, and scanned minutely the narrow space. He gazed, with particular attention, at the spot where the dog had lain, and then walked in a wider circle about the margin of the small clearing, as if counting the tracks that led from it.

The form of this child of the forest was muscular and well-proportioned, and the thin, party-colored, cotton hunting-shirt, which covered the upper part of his body, and which was rent in many places by the thorns, could not entirely conceal his broad shoulders and sinewy arms. This garment was fastened about his waist by a leathern belt, in which were hung a small sharp tomahawk, and after the custom of the whites, a broad knife; his nether limbs were cased in dark-colored leggings, with a fringe nearly two inches in breadth, running down the outer seam; about his neck he wore a large silver plate, cut in the form of a shield, upon which a stag was engraved, very simply, yet not without skill. He bore no other ornament, even the powder-pouch, which hung at his right side, was destitute of the glass-beads and strips of colored leather with which the natives are so fond of decorating their hunting implements. His head was uncovered, and his long, black, and glossy hair, hung in matted locks about his brows, and reached to his shoulders. In his right hand he carried a long western rifle.

He continued his investigation for several minutes, then rose erect, brushed his hair from his forehead, cast yet another careful glance around him, and at once disappeared in the thicket, in a direction opposite to that from which he had first emerged upon the open space.

CHAPTER II.

ON the same morning two horsemen, who evidently belonged to the better class of farmers, were riding along the county road, scarcely five hundred paces from the thicket described in the foregoing chapter. Notwithstanding the great contrast, visible in their appearance and bearing, they seemed, in other respects, to harmonize wonderfully; they kept up a quick and animated conversation, and the tall and well-shaped youth, who was mounted upon a fiery bay horse that conformed with evident reluctance and oft-repeated opposition to the steady pace into which its master reined it, laughed loudly, and often at the jests and observations of his short and corpulent companion.

The latter was a man of about fifty-five years of age; his face was round and ruddy, and the expression of his features as kind and good-natured as could possibly be imagined. His full and portly form was in admirable keeping with his physiognomy, and his small, twinkling gray eyes, glanced gayly and joyously, as if to say; "I am a capital fellow, and if I were more so, there would be no standing it." With the exception of his black and brightly-polished shoes, he was clothed from head to foot in snow-white cotton-stuff, but could he have gained all the treasures of earth by the feat, he would have found it impossible to button the small cotton jacket that he wore, it had so shrunk in the washing, or what was more probable, his rotund body had so expanded and "aldermanized" itself, as he expressed it. His face was shaded by a bright, yellow straw hat, and a narrow yellow neck-cloth held together his open shirt-collar, be-

neath which a portion of his broad and sunburned breast was visible, while, with somewhat of a display of vanity, the corner of a fiery red pocket-handkerchief hung from the right pocket of his pantaloons, which was sufficiently spacious to contain and conceal half a dozen of them.

His companion was a well-shaped and handsome-looking young man, with dark, flashing eyes, and a frank and open expression of countenance. His dress resembled the usual garb of the western farmers, consisting of a frock-coat and pantaloons of cotton stuff, and a black-striped vest of the same material. He wore no shoes, however, but his feet were clad, after the Indian fashion, in neat, but plainly-worked moccasins, and this, as well as his glance, which, though not anxious, roamed continually around, remarking every object, betokened him a hunter, although neither he nor the friend at his side bore any visible weapons about him. His head was covered by a black, well-worn, felt-hat, and in his hand he held a heavy riding-whip of leather.

"A d—l of a fellow that brother of mine," said the shorter of the two companions, whose name was Harper, proceeding in a narrative which he had commenced concerning some mad prank of his elder brother's, who, at that time, lived in Cincinnati, "and he had a passion for buying old traps and plunder. When I was up there last fall, his wife complained to me about the matter; the whole house, she said, was crammed with old furniture, crockery, and kitchen utensils, ten times more than she could use, and the fellow ran around every evening to the auctions, and whatever he found going cheap he was sure to buy. But when he had once bought a thing, he never looked at it a second time. One day I advised my sister-in-law to send the trash secretly to auction, and get rid of it; then she could lay up the money, and buy something useful with it afterward. The plan was a good one; I hired a cartman, and in the course of the afternoon, when my brother was at his business, I sent the whole lot down to Front street, and before it was dark the house was cleared. My sister-in-law now felt relieved, and when her husband came home at half-past ten, she made us a capital bowl of punch—by-the-by, Bill, we must brew some punch here for once; the confounded people in this quarter, almost all belong to the temperance society, therefore—but, where did I leave off? ab, yes, at the punch—well, we sat over the punch until half-past eleven, and my brother kept telling one story after another—he was a great hand at a story! I asked him once or twice why he was so merry, but he was as mum as a stone-fence; the next morning he goes off at about six o'clock, and brings home three cart-loads of—what do you think? Why, the very rubbish that I had sent to auction the day before; not an article was missing, and he seemed delighted at the capital bargain he had made."

"Not so bad, uncle," said the young man laughing, as he cast a side-glance upon him; "and do you expect me to believe that?"

"How, fellow! have I ever told you a lie? No, never. In future, when I relate a fact to you, you needn't grin so, and stretch your mouth from ear to ear; do you hear that, my gentleman?"

"Why, my dear uncle, you must n't take it amiss, but when you begin a story I am always eager to hear the end, for it is usually something funny—it is true perhaps, I laugh a little too soon."

"Funny! hear the fellow! I never tell funny stories—have you ever heard me tell a funny story? This last was serious, serious enough. My brother will ruin himself by this infernal passion—he can't help it."

"But your brother is said to be a shrewd business man, and if he is a little singular in this respect, he no doubt balances the account ten times in other ways."

"A shrewd business man! God bless you, lad! there doesn't live a more cunning merchant on earth than my brother, only he is sometimes too cunning, too cunning. I remember well enough, when we were hunting together in Kentucky, how he used to take in the peddlers with old possum-skins; the fellow sewed raccoon's tails to them, and sold them for raccoon-skins. But I must tell you of a trick he played me on Coni lake. We were paddling around together on the lake in our old canoe, partly to harpoon the fish, partly to shoot the deer as they came to the shore for a cool drink. It was remarkably hot, and the

sun scorched us awfully; to make myself more comfortable, I took off my hunting-shirt, and as I was holding my powder-flask by the string across my fingers away it goes overboard, plump into the water!

"There I sat; the lake was as clear as crystal, and though it was about fifteen feet deep I could see the horn as plainly as if I could reach it with my hand. George had always been a wonderful leaper, runner, swimmer and diver, and when he saw the fix I was in—he was in as bad a one himself, for he had just told me that he was out of powder, and it was monstrous dear in that part of the country—he offered very kindly to dive for it, and without a word more jumped overboard. When he reached the bottom, which was soft mud, the water got a little r'ly, and he had to wait a minute till it became clear again. In the meanwhile I had taken off my hunting-shirt and was now sitting upon it; but at last it seemed to me that he was staying under water rather long, and feeling quite uneasy about him I looked over the edge of the boat, and—what do you think he was doing down there, eh?"

"I don't know, but I suppose what anybody else would have done in such a case, trying to come to the top as soon as possible."

"Wrong!" cried the old man, and, in the excitement of the moment, as if struck by the remembrance, he checked his pony for an instant—"wrong! There he stood, as coolly as if he was on level ground, and bent over so that I shouldn't see what he was about; but I saw well enough; the rascal was pouring my powder secretly into his own horn, confound him! and when he came up again my horn was half empty! Well, you needn't laugh as if you would fall from your horse. Isn't that true again? Has your old uncle ever told you a lie—eh?"

"Oh, no, uncle Ben! don't be angry; I believe every syllable of it; but—ha! don't you see that red thing yonder down across there—beyond the fallen pine—just there between the oak and the mulberry tree?"

"Where? ah, there yes, it's a deer, sure enough. If Assowaum were here with his rifle he could shoot the creature with the greatest ease; by keeping behind the trees a man might creep to within fifty or sixty paces of him."

"Where can Assowaum keep himself?" said the young man, rising somewhat impatiently in his stirrups and looking back along the road, as if in expectation of seeing the figure of the Indian; "he glided all at once into the wood—I thought he saw game. What a glorious shot he would have!" he continued, in a repressed tone; "I wish I had brought my rifle with me."

"Mrs. Roberts would have given you a fine welcome, if you had brought the thing to her house on the Sabbath; she won't even let the Indian do it, and he—but thunder and lightning! the beast is wonderfully tame; it must be that it don't hear us."

The two men, proceeding quietly onward along the road, had in the meanwhile come quite near the deer, which was standing in one of those countless salt-licks that are found on both banks of the La Fave, especially on the northern. It seemed not to have the slightest presentiment of approaching danger; once, indeed, it raised its head and snuffed the wind, but probably rather to draw breath than to look out for enemies, for the men now saw that it was licking in a deep hole in the clayey bank of a little brook, an excavation which had been formed by the frequent stamping of horses, cows, and especially of deer. The animal stood for a few seconds in this position, with its back turned toward our two friends, lashing away the swarming flies with its tail, then stooped down again to enjoy anew the savor of the rich and saltish soil. Its horns had just sprouted, and, being scarcely four inches in length, were but a slight hindrance to his object; and, bending his head sidewise, he thrust it more deeply into the hole, in order to reach the bottom with its long and flexible tongue.

"Bill, where can the Indian be?" said Harper, in a whisper, and with ill-concealed ardor for the chase; "I believe a man could creep to within five paces of the stupid beast, without its seeing him. Ah, Bill, you should have seen me creep when I was young! Why, I once—"

"If you keep behind the roots of the hickory-tree, uncle, I think you could manage it," whispered the young man, with a smile.

"Nonsense, boy! Do you think I'm going to crawl around in the wood, with these old bones, only to frighten innocent cattle? No, no!" Notwithstanding these protestations, however, Harper had leaped from his horse, which stood patient and motionless, while the short, stout man, dressed all in white, his face flushed with expectation, glided forward upon tiptoe, keeping the roots of a fallen tree between himself and the deer, apparently with the intention of enjoying the mighty leaps of the animal when it should, at last, scent him so close at hand. The beast, however, was to the windward, and did not seem aware of his approach, for it raised its head again, stretched out its neck for a moment, and then resumed its meal.

William Brown, or Bill, as his uncle called him for brevity's sake, now began to take an interest in the adventure; and sitting motionless upon his horse, in order to avoid the slightest noise, he watched with breathless attention his uncle's progress, who at this instant reached the roots of the tree, and was now scarcely ten paces from the deer. Here he stopped for a moment, and looked around toward his nephew, drawing his face into a comical grin, as if to say, "Well, Bill, ain't I a d—l of a fellow?" He paused here, however, several seconds, either because he was astonished at the incomprehensible heedlessness of the young deer, or because he hesitated to venture further with his clean shoes, for he had now reached the very verge of the salt-lick, and the banks of the little stream that flowed through the clayey soil had been trampled in to a soft mire by the numberless hoofs of deer and cattle. His old fondness for the chase, however, at last silenced all his scruples, for it seemed now, for the first time, to enter his mind that he might actually grasp the deer; and, without further reflection, he stepped softly and carefully into the slimy slough, destroying the polish of his well-blacked Sunday shoes in a most unwarrantable manner.

He advanced nearer and nearer toward the beast; Brown, breathless with expectation, raised himself in his stirrups, and the old man's heart, as he afterward declared, beat so loudly, that he feared at every moment the deer might hear it. The latter now raised its head, but, before it had time to move a limb, Harper, forgetting sabbath and sabbath-clothes, rushed forward, and caught the animal by its hind legs, at the very instant that the terrified beast reared aloft to escape, by a prodigious leap, from so dangerous a neighbor. It was too late. The old man clung, as with a grasp of iron, to his prey; but the desperate efforts of his prisoner drew him forward at full length, and dragged him through the muddy soil. In vain he raised his head, as far as his short, stout neck permitted, in order to save this, at least, from the miry bath. The thick liquid spouted aloft, as, like a vessel loosed from the stocks, he plunged into the pool, and submerged for an instant, rose again to the surface.

"Hold fast!" cried Brown, huzzing and shouting his usual hunting-cry—"hold fast, uncle! Hurrah for the old fellow! that's what I call a hunt!"

This admonition was in nowise necessary, however, for nothing was further from Harper's thoughts than to lose his hold now, when he had so seriously compromised not only his Sunday attire, but also his own person. He could not venture, indeed, to call for help, for to open his mouth under present circumstances might have been attended with the most disagreeable consequences, but he held on as if his soul's safety depended upon the tightness of his grasp. It cannot be doubted that an expression of iron firmness and resolution was depicted in his features, as, with his eyes tightly closed, he was dragged prone through the salt lick, but his maternal soil had covered his entire countenance with such a crust, that it was impossible to recognize this expression.

It is true, Brown had, at once, hastened to his aid, but the sight was so ludicrous that he threw himself at his length in the bushes that bordered the lick and laughed convulsively, until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and it was a full minute before he was able to control himself. As he, at last, leaped up, however, he heard the sharp crack of a rifle, and the deer, mortally wounded, sprung up for the last time, tearing its pinioned limbs from the old man's grasp, and fell dead upon the earth.

Harper had heard the report of the rifle, and scrambling to his feet, he cried in a tone of fury:

"Who fired that shot?" but as he was unable to open his eyes, he turned in the wrong direc-

tion, where no one was standing, and thus excited Brown's laughter anew. The concealed marksman soon made his appearance, for the Indian stepped from a small thicket of sassafras trees, and, as he beheld the sad plight of the usually so pleasant man, as he stood before him with closed eyes and wide-spread fingers, he gave vent to his ludicrous amazement in a loud "Waugh!"

"Bill! Bill! the confounded rascal! Bill, come here, and lead me to the spring. Thunder and lightning! will you let me stand here all day until the clay gets so hard that the d—l himself can't scrape it off? Bill, I say—scoundrel, will you leave your old uncle sticking here in the mud?"

Brown, indeed, actually needed a few seconds to collect himself; he then stepped to the very edge of the mire, and reached the poor man a dry branch which lay near; the latter quickly grasped it, and his obedient nephew at once led him to the brook, where, first of all, he washed the mud from his eyes, that he might see what was passing around him.

The first object that met his glance was the form of the Indian, who was occupied in calmly reloading his rifle.

"So, Mr. Red-skin, do you think I crawl around in the mire of a Sunday morning, and hold deer by the hind legs, until it pleases you to come and shoot them down at your ease? When I have caught a deer alive, at the risk of my neck, what right have you to kill it? Why not go around my house, and shoot the cattle and hogs?"

"But, uncle, we shall be late at meeting."

"The meeting may go to the d—l! Do you think I am going to meeting in this style? No, I will first tell this red-skin a piece of my mind. Is that the way to steal softly after a man, and, in d—d Indian fashion, shoot the game out of his very hands?"

"But, uncle, you couldn't have held the deer two seconds longer."

"Not two seconds longer! How do you know how long I could have held him? My brother once held a bear all night, and—"

"But you surely didn't want to catch the deer alive!" said his nephew, interrupting, for he feared, and not without good reason, one of his uncle's long stories.

"And why not? Isn't my fence high enough to keep a whole herd of deer, and is it any of this red-skin's business what I intend to do with my own property? Well, what is there to grin at in that, heh?"

The Indian against whom all these indignant phrases were fulminated had stood quiet, without replying a word, busied with reloading his rifle, which he had previously swabbed and cleansed. While thus occupied, he drew his face into a broad and friendly smile, revealing a double row of dazzling white teeth, and replied in broken English:

"My father is very strong, but a deer is fleet, and once out of the white man's hand, he would never have left his track in the soft soil of the La Fave again. My father would have meat—here it is."

"The d—l is your father," grumbled Harper, angrily; "if I have to thank any one for the meat, it is these two bones." He here extended his sturdy arms. "What say you, boy," he continued, in a more friendly tone, as he recalled to mind his heroic feat—"what say you, boy, no one will do that after me so very soon? It is lucky that you both saw it, for the d—l take me, if Roberts would have believed a word of the matter. Scandalous set here—as if I ever told a lie! but they look and wink and thrust their elbows into each other's ribs, as much as to say: 'Lord bless us! there's a fine story again!' But I must now wash, or the stuff will dry."

"But we shall be too late for the sermon," said Brown, looking somewhat impatiently at the sun.

"Go to the d—l with your sermon! What do I care to hear the sneaking hypocrite, Rawson, preach? I can do just as well as he, and as to the fellow's piety—"

"Do you mean to ride home again first?"

"Of course—do you go on before; I'll be there in good time."

"But what will become of the game?"

"What will become of the game, Master Impudence? That's easily said—that marches upon my pony into my kitchen. I think I have honestly earned it; so, Assowaum, that's right!" He now turned to the Indian, who was dragging the slain deer by its short antlers to the brook, in order to wash off the thick mud

into which it had fallen, and with which it was thoroughly incrusted. "Wash it off, that an honest Christian may with decency take it upon his horse—but, hallo! what is that, Master Scalping-knife—what the deuce are you about?"

This exclamation was called forth by the conduct of the Indian, who, with the utmost coolness, had emboweled the deer, and now began to remove the skin from one of its hind legs.

"I don't want the skin off, do you hear? Why, the rascal's deaf."

Assowaum, however, did not allow himself to be disturbed in his occupation, but calmly and deliberately removed a hind-quarter from the deer, hung it by a strip of hickory bark across his shoulder, and then replied quietly:

"The white man is alone in his wigwam, and Assowaum is hungry."

"Oh, take half of the flesh, for what I care, but I shall get all bloody."

"But not more dirty," replied the Indian, briefly. He then cast his rifle across his shoulder, and walked quickly up the road, leaving all further care of the dead deer to the two men. Brown aided his uncle to raise the mutilated carcass upon his horse; the latter climbed into the saddle, and, now in a good humor again, he conjured his nephew, above all things, not to relate the adventure at Roberts's until he was there himself; he would only ride home quickly, change his clothes, and follow him as soon as possible. Brown promised to comply with his wish, and then rode, at a sharp trot after the Indian, who was now considerably in advance of him.

CHAPTER III.

ASSAWAUM, the Feathered Arrow, belonged to one of the northern tribes of Missouri, and several years before, as the game grew more and more rare in the hunting grounds of his people, which were fast becoming settled with a white population, he had wandered toward the South, for, at that time, the country bordering on the La Fave, was noted for the abundance of its game. But it was not solely for the sake of the game that he had left his tribe; he had been compelled to fly, in order to escape the vengeance of his enemies, for he had slain a chief, who, when intoxicated with the fire-water of the whites, had assaulted his wife, whose cries for help summoned him in time both to preserve her from violence and to avenge her. Accompanied by the latter he had reared a little wigwam, not far from Harper's dwelling, whom he had formerly known in Missouri. He here lived by hunting, while his wife wove baskets from the slender rushes, which grow in the bottom lands of the South, or braided soft mats from the flexible bark of the papoo-tree; these Assowaum took, together with his skins, down the river to Little Rock, and bartered them with the merchants of that rising city for powder and lead or other necessaries of life, and sometimes, though seldom, for ready money.

His wife had been converted to the Christian religion by the Methodist preacher or circuit rider, as he was called, for he preached alternately in almost all the settlements of this, as well as of the adjoining county; all his attempts, however, to induce Assowaum to follow her example had been fruitless, and Rawson in vain endeavored to persuade the hardened sinner, as he was in the habit of calling him, to forsake the religion of his fathers, and take refuge in the arms of the only true church, to wit, the Methodist. The Indian steadfastly persisted in his resolution to die in the faith of his tribe, and did not suffer the admonitions and threatenings of the fanatic preacher to disturb or bewilder him in his purpose.

At early dawn, Alapaha, Assowaum's wife, had started for the settlement, to listen to the Methodist's preaching, and Assowaum now followed her thither, partly to accompany her home, partly to convey to his wigwam a number of otter-skins, which he had taken in that part of the country, and which he had left at Roberts's house. Most of the settlers were well disposed toward the two Indians, for they were orderly in their demeanor, and very obliging, whenever it was in their power to render any one a service. The chief, however, always preserved a far greater gravity and reserve than his wife, who was fond of playing with the children of the white settlers, and seemed never weary of their wild sports.

"Did you ever see a figure like my uncle's

before?" cried the young man, laughing, when he had, at last, overtaken the Indian.

"He looked like mud-turtle," said the latter, with a smile, "only a good deal muddier; the old man tell big story when he comes to the huts of his friends."

"Like enough; but it was strange that he could hold the beast so long; I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"He is not weak, his bones are iron," replied Assowaum. "But a deer is strong, and if Assowaum had come a moment later, he would have found no flesh in the salt-lick, but the little man's."

"It may be so; he denies that, however, stoutly; he swears that he could have held the deer all night."

"The little man has big words," said the savage.

"Do you know old Barker, who has lately built him a little hut on the Petit-Jean?" inquired Brown.

The savage smiled, and cast a side-glance at his companion.

"Have you ever spoken with him?" continued the young man.

"He has told me about his hunts on the Bay de View, and on Cache river. He shot nineteen deer in one day, and the smallest skin weighed eleven pounds, dried."

"He draws a long bow," said Brown, laughing. "I should like to see uncle and Barker together once."

"And I," said Assowaum, who seemed pleased at the thought. The two men now advanced, in silence, for several miles along the broad road, without meeting with a single person, until the loud and long-drawn tones of a psalm echoed in the distance; the Indian listened for a moment with great attention, then quietly pursued his way, saying:

"The pale man"—this was the name which he gave to Rawson, on account of the remarkable pallor of his features—"has a very big voice; he is like a young wolf—let the old ones howl ever so loud, you always hear the young ones."

"You don't like the preacher, then, Assowaum?"

"No—Alapaha loved the Great Spirit—she prayed to the Manitou, who protected her fathers, and was an obedient wife; she never crossed Assowaum's path when he went to hunt, and when, in the first dark night, she drew her *matchecata* around the newly planted cornfield, the worms and the beasts kept far away, and the fruit was blessed. Alapaha now laughs at Assowaum's Great Spirit, and the game goes from his path when he walks in the wood."

The Indian seemed unwilling to continue the conversation; he proceeded silently and quickly onward, until they came to the outer fence of Roberts's farm, where a broad path, running between two cornfields, led to the main building, from which the singing they had heard at a distance, now echoed clearly and distinctly. On reaching the house, Brown hung his horse's bridle over a fence-post, and entered the chamber, in which the devout worshipers were collected.

The psalm was just ended, and the whole assembly were upon their knees, with their backs to the preacher and their faces resting upon the seats of their chairs, while Rawson, whom the reader has met under very different circumstances in the forest, stood erect in their midst, and with his eyes closed devoutly, and in a sharp, repulsive voice, uttered a long prayer, in which he recounted the fearful sinfulness of all present, and implored Heaven's mercy and compassion instead of the chastisement which they so richly merited.

Brown, who belonged to a different sect, stood with folded hands, listening devoutly, upon the threshold, but did not approach nearer. In vain Rawson beckoned to him with a repeated and friendly gesture to take the place at his side, he did not seem to observe him, but gazed in silence upon the floor. At last the preacher concluded his prayer, and all rose to disperse. The service was ended. Brown now saluted several young girls of his acquaintance who were present, for females of all ages were assembled here, from the whole country round.

"You have come very late, Mr. Brown," said Marion Roberts, old Roberts's daughter, a charming girl of eighteen years, who for six months had been the affianced bride of the pious preacher.

"Did you notice my absence, Miss Marion?

If so, I am very sorry that I missed the greater part of the service."

"That is very well said, Mr. Brown; but I have too good an opinion of you to believe that your presence on so solemn an occasion is owing to anything but the service itself."

"I am not a Methodist."

"And what of that? Are we not all Christians?"

"Your betrothed thinks differently on that subject." Brown emphasized the word "betrothed," and gazed inquiringly in the face of the lovely girl. The latter avoided his glance, however, and replied:

"His views are, perhaps, somewhat too strict. I, for my part, am much more tolerant, and—my father also; mother, it is true, is very rigid, especially on this point. Mother's and Mr. Rawson's views are generally greatly alike."

"The blame on this occasion, cannot be thrown upon me, Miss Marion. I had set out in good time; but my uncle—an accident detained him—and he was obliged to return home."

"He is not ill?" said Marion, quickly, in a tone of anxious interest.

"I thank you heartily for the sympathy which you manifest in his behalf," replied the young man, warmly; "my uncle will be delighted when he hears of it; you are a great favorite with him."

Marion blushed and asked, changing the subject—

"But why did he not come with you?"

"He met with an adventure," answered Brown, smiling—"one which he has forbidden me to relate, as he wishes to tell it in person. You know his passion for telling stories."

"Oh, how pleased I shall be to hear him!" cried Marion, clapping her hands together; "that is delightful!"

"And may I know what it is that is so delightful?" inquired Mr. Rawson, stepping forward and greeting the young man with a friendly salutation.

"An adventure that happened to my uncle, or rather a feat that he performed, and—"

"Did you see it yourself?" inquired Marion, with a smile; "you know your good uncle—"

"But, Marion," interrupted Rawson, in a grave and admonitory tone, "is it right, so soon after divine service, to employ your thoughts with the profane affairs of earth? Your mother would be sadly grieved were she to hear you."

"Mr. Rawson," said Brown, pained at being witness to a reproof which called a deep blush upon the maiden's cheeks, "you are Miss Roberts's affianced bridegroom, and the preacher of this county; you have therefore a double right over the young girl; but I should think that an innocent jest, a gay and pleasant word can not be displeasing in the eyes of God. Everything has its time—devout at prayer and cheerful at table."

Rawson would doubtless have replied to this speech, but at this moment old Roberts approached them, and, shaking the young man heartily by the hand, he cried:

"Well done, my lad! I am glad to see you here at last; but may the d—" It is probable that he might have concluded his speech in a manner scarcely suited to the day, had he not in good time met the grave and severe glance of the preacher, and checking himself he continued—"but for the last four weeks—how long is it, though, that you have been in Arkansas?"

"Six weeks," answered Brown.

"Well, yes; and you have hardly been here twice during the last four; and before that you used to come every day. And by—by-the-by, it's not so very amusing here in this lonely spot of land, that we can afford to do without good company. Harper comes much oftener; but where does he keep himself to day?"

"He will be here soon."

"By-the-way, Brown, for fear I should forget it—I invite you, four weeks from to-day, to my daughter's wedding—you and your uncle—you must both come or nothing will go right, and then—"

"Excuse me," replied Brown, quickly, half-turning his face aside, "in—four weeks I shall be no longer in Arkansas."

"No longer in Arkansas! what? I thought your uncle had purchased land, and intended to settle here."

"Yes, my uncle will settle here, but I—I shall join the volunteers, who are going to Texas. The country is trying to free itself."

from the dominion of Mexico, as I heard a few days since in Little Rock, and it needs American arms."

"Nonsense!" cried Roberts, grasping the young man by the hand. "Let the men of Texas fight their own battles, but do you remain with us. We, on the La Fave here, need stout and honest fellows, to hold the balance against the numerous knaves in this quarter; and—all the girls will be at the weddiug, and the d—l is in it—it will be strange enough, I mean—if you can't find one for yourself among them. Oh, never fear," he continued, as he saw that Brown shook his head slightly, "there is a capital set of girls hereabouts, only they live so far apart; but a man like you, indeed, who goes nowhere and makes no visits, can never get a sight of them, of course. But here comes Harper—thunder and—ahem!—how red he looks!"

It was, in truth, that worthy gentleman, who was now approaching at a round trot, probably because he was afraid that Brown might have prated, and while still at a distance he cried to him: "Well, my lad, have you kept a close mouth, eh?"

"Not breathed a syllable, uncle."

"Well done! Boys, I've had an adventure this morning—I've had a hunt."

"A hunt, Mr. Harper!" cried Mrs. Roberts in a tone of reproof, for the good woman had stepped forward, and greeted the two men with a friendly air; "a hunt on the holy Sabbath-day!"

"Without my rifle, Mrs. Roberts, without my rifle; all in perfect innoconce. But I must begin at the beginning—such a thing don't happen to a man every day— Bill, stop! stay here, boy; you are my witness. Where is Assowaum?"

"He went out into the field to the burning trunk, probably to roast a piece of venison."

"Good! he'll be here by-and-by. I must have witnesses, or the folks won't believe it; they never will, unless it's somethin' they've had a hand in themselves. You ought to have heard my brother tell stories once."

"Or old Barker," cried Roberts, laughing.

"Pugh! who's old Barker? I hear everybody talking about old Barker; I must pay him a visit. He ain't the giraffe, I suppose?"

"We shall ride in that direction next Tuesday, to look aftor our hogs that are running at large," said Roberts. "If you feel so disposed, Mr. Harper, you can go with us; we will then stop at Barker's over night."

"Agreed!" cried Harper; "but now to my story."

While the little man, with great self-complacency, related his singular adventure to his attentive hearers, Rawson, who considered that it ill-accorded with his office to join in the general gayety so soon after divine worship, passed from the back door of the house into the field, or rather into the clearing, for no corn was as yet planted there, nor were the felled trees entirely removed. In order to get rid of the large trunks with the least trouble, Roberts had kindled a fire around them—a circumstance of which Assowaum was now taking advantage; for he had seated himself near a heap of burning coals, in order to roast several pieces of deer which Harper had caught. Alapaha, however, had observed and followed him hither, and, after the Indian custom, was now preparing his meal. Stretched negligently upon his outspread blanket, and alternately inbaling and expelling the smoke from a short tobacco-pipe made by his own hands, lay the vigorous form of the red son of the forest, near the trunk of a gigantic oak, an emblem of his race, which but a short time before had looked proudly and boldly over the wide land its own property, but now lay felled to earth, so that the white intruder knew not at once in what way he could the most quickly and easily remove it from his path. As the burning embers gnawed upon the trunk of the tree, so did the fire-water upon the stem of the red warriors, consuming the very principle of life, the pith and marrow of that noble race, and leaving naught but coals and ashes behind. The bones of the warriors fattened the soil which the white man turned up with the plow, and the hearthstones of their council-fires were now the monuments of their departed renown.

Such were the thoughts, perhaps, which crossed the mind of Assowaum, who, unlike thousands of his race, had not suffered the vices of the whites to find entrance into his heart, as he gazed at the crackling coals, when

his wife rose suddenly from her task and walked toward the house. She had seen the preacher approaching, and she hastened to meet him. The latter reached her his hand, and uttered a long and fervent prayer over her. In the meanwhile the flesh hissed upon the coals, and was burned on one side.

Alapaha was one of those rare specimens of Indian beauty in which the distinguishing characteristics of the race, that are usually far from being pleasing in the eyes of the whites, are a source of loveliness and attraction; her projecting cheek-bones were lost beneath her full and healthy cheeks, her lips were swelling, her dark eyes shone with ardor, her ivory teeth would have shamed those of a negress, and her pliant and luxurious form was far from being so closely veiled by her light garment of dressed skins as not to afford some idea of its beautiful and faultless proportions. Her delicate feet were incased in neatly-worked moccasins, her hair was held together on the top of her head by a bright red handkerchief, and her ears and neck were decorated with glass beads.

"Alapaha" cried Assowaum, in earnest yet not unkind tones to his wife, "does the Great Spirit of the Christians tell Alapaha that she must neglect the duties which she owes to her chief and husband?" Alapaha hastened back to her task, and Rawson approached the red warrior, who merely greeted him with a nod, and remained quietly extended upon his blanket.

"Do not be angry with your wife, my brother Assowaum," said the preacher, in a friendly tone, "do not be angry with her for listening to the word of the Lord; it is the welfare of her immortal soul which she has in view, and you should be the last one to lay a hindrance in her way."

"Assowaum is not angry, and does not hinder her in her faith," answered the savage; "but he is hungry, and the flesh is burning. Alapaha is the wife of the red-man."

"I have long wished for another opportunity to impress your mind with a due sense of the blessings of Christianity, but you constantly avoid me. May I avail myself of the present occasion?"

The Indian did not reply; he took the venison which Alapaha reached to him upon a rudely-carved wooden dish, and began his meal. The reverend preacher now recited various powerful passages from the Scriptures, which teach the depravity of man and the mercy of God, not forgetting to recount the many miracles which the Savior had performed during his life on earth, until he died upon the cross for the reconciliation of all flesh. He hoped, probably, by these interesting narratives, to succeed more easily in producing an impression upon the imaginative mind of the son of the forest, than by solemn admonitions or consecutive arguments. The Indian calmly continued his meal; and even when he had finished it he did not interrupt the preacher by a single word, a single glance, but still listened attentively to his words. Rawson, therefore, encouraged by his silence, continued with increasing zeal to extol the Christian religion and to commend it to the favor of the savage by rehearsing such of its attributes only as he believed, and not unjustly indeed, would have the greatest worth in the eyes of his untutored auditor.

"Has the pale man ended?" asked Assowaum, at last, as the preacher paused from weariness.

"I have," replied Rawson, "and what does my brother say to my words?"

Assowaum threw aside the blanket, which he had partly wrapped around him, rose, and stepping close to the Christian, he said:

"Long, long ago, the Great Spirit—whom you call God—created the world and out of the world he made men—Indians—they did not come across the great water. He spread a covering over the earth and placed the men beneath it, all the tribes were there collected. But one of the tribes sent one of its young men up to see what was doing above, and he found it all bright and clear, and he rejoiced over the beauty of all things. A stag ran by with an arrow in its side, he followed it and came to the place where it had fallen and died; he saw other tracks also, and soon the Being who had shot the beast came. It was the Great Spirit himself, and he now taught him how to strip off the skin and cut up the flesh. The Great Spirit then commanded him to make a fire, but the Indian knew not how—the Great Spirit must do it for him; he then

told him to place a piece of flesh upon a stick and roast it, but the Indian knew not how, and he let it burn on one side, while the other remained raw."

Rawson made a gesture as if he would speak, but the grave glance of the red-man checked him.

"After the Great Spirit had thus taught the red-man to kill the game, and to use its skin and its flesh, he called the others out of the earth, and they came tribe by tribe, and each chose a chief. The Great Spirit made also the good principle and the bad principle: they were brothers. The one went out to do good the other to destroy the works of his brother. This one made the rocky places, caused poisonous fruits to grow and did mischief. The good principle wished to remove the bad principle, but not by violence; he therefore proposed that they should run a race, and the one who was beaten should depart far away. The bad principle consented and—"

"Hold!" cried the Methodist, rising quickly from the trunk upon which he had been seated; "it does not become me, on the holy Sabbath, to listen to such fables. Poor blind heathen! it is the training of thine unhappy superstition which teaches thee to believe in such a web of lies. Banish it from thee. Our blessed Lord—"

While the Methodist uttered this admonition, the Indian did not interrupt him with a syllable, but he fastened upon him a glance so fierce, so full of rage and fury, that the latter started, paused in his speech, and looked around toward the house, which stood but at a short distance. Assowaum controlled the storm in his bosom, and gazing gloomily at the preacher, he said, with a firm though soft voice:

"My ears have drank in the white man's words. He has told me of the chief who changed sticks into snakes, and pressed water from the rock; of the fish which kept a white man for days in its belly, and then vomited him upon the land; of the prophet who went to Heaven in a fiery chariot; and of Him who was offered up and died, and still came alive again upon the earth. Assowaum has believed all. I now tell the pale man how the Great Spirit on this side of the big water created his children, and he says that my tongue lies. Go!" he continued, extending his arm toward the somewhat abashed preacher, "the eye of the pale man looks only at the spot where his own wigwam stands—all the rest is dark."

And without waiting for a reply, Assowaum walked toward the house, leaving his wife to follow him.

In the meanwhile Harper had narrated his adventure amid the laughter and applause of his listeners; but as none approached, they, for the most part, dispersed to their various dwellings, that they might not lose their dinner. Harper and Brown being rare visitors, had been invited by Mrs. Roberts to partake of their simple meal.

Before the table was spread, however, Roberts beckoned to Brown to go with him to the fenced field, where he kept his best horses, for in these all his pride and ambition were centered. Not a man in the States had better horses than he, and whoever bartered with old Roberts, might be certain to get the worst of the bargain, for no one had a surer eye for the blemishes or excellences of this noble beast than he.

Before the reader becomes better acquainted with the old man, however, it will be necessary to mention a singular habit to which he was addicted in conversation; whatever the topic with which he started he was unable to keep to it for a single moment, but rambled on, from subject to subject, in the most desultory and incoherent manner possible. Those who knew him intimately were well aware of his peculiarities, and always interrupted him at the proper moment, when he would at once return to his original theme of discourse. If suffered to proceed undisturbed, however, he completely lost his way, and came, at last, to a sudden halt, without being able to remember a single word of what he first intended to say.

When they had reached the lot, as it was called, he directed the young man's attention to the several beasts, told him how cheap this was, how much he had paid for that, how many miles another could trot in an hour, and found himself here completely in his element, especially as Brown gave him to understand that he thought of buying a horse of him in a few days, a strong and powerful one, and able to endure the fatigues of a campaign in Texas.

"You can suit yourself with me, Brown; I

can provide you with one," cried the old man gayly, entirely forgetting for the moment that he would thereby be deprived of the young man's society, and, probably, for a long while. That bay yonder is a capital horse! you can't kill him—as lively at night as in the morning, and only just four years old—but—what am I thinking of? You talk of going to Texas? Tut—tut—that must never be!—I should like to sell you the horse—but the d—d here he looked involuntarily around to see if his wife were near enough to overhear him. "No, Brown, that is all fiddle-faddle! Texas is a country where no honest Christian can live; only Indians—and what a set they are; I remember right well when the Creek Indians came through here, corn cost at that time two dollars a bushel, and we couldn't find enough for them; now, indeed, it's cheaper, and by going down to Little Rock—"

"This tame and quiet life here does not suit me; I must see a little of the world," said Brown interrupting him; "after a time I will return again."

"From Texas, eh? Nobody ever returns from there—at least, no honest fellow—all the rogues and rascals are marching that way at present, and the saying—go to h—l! is entirely out of fashion; they are much more severe now and wish a man a journey to Texas. The soil there is n't a whit better than ours; I own land below in the canebrake, that I wouldn't part with for ten dollars an acre, and the most—You ought to see my hogs next winter; I have bought a new kind from Atkins. He let me have two, and I would have taken more, but his brother—he is a lawyer in Poinsett county—yet I can't comprehend what kind of a practice he can have there—"

"You will find your house quite still and lonely soon," said Brown, who had gazed upon the ground, for a moment, lost in deep thought. "Your son is in Tennessee, and when Marion—is married—"

"Yes, that's true; I shall find it strange; well, it's not my fault; I have talked enough against it. I don't know why, but I can't bear preachers. Two years ago there came one—"

"Mr. Rawson seems to be a staid and quiet man."

"Quiet, yes—very quiet; but—this between ourselves—he don't seem to me like a man. Heathcote lately said things to him, for which I would have run a knife through his body, but he made no reply. That Heathcote is a savage fellow, his father was one of the old Virginians who—"

"You said that the wedding was to take place in four weeks, I believe?"

"In four weeks—yes—I have told him that he couldn't have my daughter until he had bought the land on which he lives, and had so arranged matters generally, that he could, at least, support a wife in comfort. We don't need much in the woods here, but still a little capital is necessary; ready money, it is true, is rather a scarce article, and the banks—"

"In what way does Rawson earn a livelihood? He receives no money for preaching."

"No, I suppose not, but he has a little property in Tennessee; eight or nine hundred dollars as he tells me; he expects the remittance of a part of it in three weeks, then he has my consent. My wife is crazy after the match. I have nothing against it, only I don't like the man's looks. It's singular what an impression the first glance sometimes makes upon you; in Tennessee, where I lived formerly, and where my father owned eighty acres of land on Wolf river—capital land that on Wolf river—and in Memphis, hardly half a mile from there, is a first-rate market for all kinds of produce. How long is it now since I was in Memphis? Yes, about that time the first steamboat came along—what was its name now—wait a minute—ah, yes, the 'New Orleans,' that must have been in 1811—Lord help us, how time flies! 1811; afterward the war broke out, and we marched across into Louisiana, but came too late, for Old Hickory had already whipped the British—a good idea that of the cotton bales; I spoke about it afterward with a fellow from Kentucky; he had fired fifty-one times, and he gave me his word that he didn't once miss his man. They are terrible shots, those Kentuckians, and when I went in 1815—the year we had that heavy frost, that killed all our fruit, I never saw such a frost in all my life. But, Brown, what are you thinking of, that you stare upon the ground? Is anything the matter with you? What was I talking about just now."

"Me? no—nothing—a little headache, I believe—I laughed so much this morning at Uncle Ben's adventure. But we were speaking about horses."

"Oh, there's time enough for that—but hallo! who comes here? one, two, three, four, five, six men, on horseback, and all with knives and rifles. Well, that will be a fine recommendation with my wife; Heathcote and Mullins, Smith and Fanning—the Lord bless us! they are the Regulators—depend upon it there's something in the wind. Well, we shall soon bear."

The old man quickly opened the gate, and Brown followed him out to welcome the horsemen, who approached at an easy trot, between the fields, down the broad road that ran westwardly.

CHAPTER IV.

IN 1836, Lynch law, that is to say, the exercise of justice by persons not legally authorized to enforce it, the punishment of criminals, by individual citizens of the State, had, for a short time again gained ground in Arkansas, and more stringent laws had been passed to prevent it, and the formation of these arbitrary tribunals had been forbidden under severe penalties. All this, however, was of little avail in a State, where, as yet, scarcely a road intersected the wilderness, and where the arm of justice was unable to reach even to the nearest settlements. At that time, also, Arkansas had become the rendezvous of a band of thieves, who had formerly plied their trade in Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi, and the settlers had with good reason combined together to assail the hereditary enemy, which threatened to disturb the quiet of their dwellings. But as everything has its bright and dark sides, so was it here. While, on the one hand, many a knave was suddenly and unexpectedly led before the tribunal, and visited with due punishment, without the help either of the justice of the peace or of the sheriff; on the other, it sometimes happened that private hatred and the spirit of vengeance turned the anger of the multitude against innocent persons, in order to let them feel the power, which, for the moment, was lodged in the hands of their enemies. Thus, in White county, the Regulators dragged an honest, industrious farmer from the midst of his family, bound him to a tree, before the eyes of his wife, who, fortunately was spared, by a swoon, from witnessing his sufferings, and amid the cries and tears of his children, whipped the unhappy man most terribly, to force him to confess a crime he had not committed. It is true, he afterward established his innocence, and shot the ringleader of the band, but the terror and shock had produced such an impression upon his wife, that she was seized with a violent fever, and died a few months afterward. It was said also, that Heathcote had been one of those Regulators, and that he had been obliged to leave White county for that reason. Be this as it may, he was a rude and savage fellow; with whom no one cared to have dealings; a wild Kentuckian, boastful and quarrelsome, although honest and upright.

The others were, for the most part, farmers of the neighborhood; all were dressed in their hunting-shirts, and armed with rifles, bowie-knives, and pistols. Heathcote, especially, bristled with pistols and dirks, and justified Roberts's expression, who said to Brown, that he looked like a piratical vessel, armed to the teeth, and ready for boarding.

"Holla, gentlemen!" cried the old man, calling to them, "where are you bound? which way are you traveling? Are the Indians coming that you make all this display of knives and shooting-irons?"

"The Indians? no!" replied Heathcote, "but something worse; the horse-thieves are at work again; they have stolen four beasts from Judge Ridley, upon the Arkansas, and the tracks run southward, but the d—d rain night before last, washed them away, and we couldn't tell whether they led to the Hot Springs or further eastward. We searched the woods yesterday in all directions but it was of no use, and we could do nothing better than to send Hopper down the river, and Bowitt across to Hot Springs county. The rest of us are going over to Wilkins's to make further arrangements for the future. Will any of you go with us?"

"I'm much obliged to you," said Roberts, "you young fellows may settle the business among yourselves; my old bones have some-

thing better to do than to roam around in the woods."

"But you own a number of horses—who knows but the rogues may pay you a visit some rainy night? you would join us then," said Heathcote laughing.

"I will wait till they do. It must be that I live in rather an inconvenient place for the rascals, or I should have lost some by this time; it's really remarkable how they spare me."

"It looks almost suspicious," said the Kentuckian, with a grin

"No, no," cried the old man, laughing good-humoredly, "not quite that. But won't you stop, gentlemen, and eat a morsel? Good-morning, Fanning! good-morning, Mullins! Hallo, Pelter! that's a new horse you're riding there—I've never seen it before—a pretty beast."

"We accept your offer," said Heathcote, dismounting, while the others followed his example, "for Wilkins never has anything to eat, and it's better for us to lay in a stock here; but no ceremony—the horses will be resting in the meanwhile."

During this interval, Brown had welcomed those of the men with whom he had become acquainted during his short residence in Arkansas, and he now walked toward the house, where the little negro-girl was busily occupied in baking corn-bread and frying pork for the unexpected guests.

"And you, Mr. Brown," asked Heathcote, now turning to the young man—"are not you inclined to lend your aid to the good cause? There can not be too many of us—since, as the law is against us, we must prove to the State that we are in earnest with the business."

"I must beg you to excuse me," replied Brown. "In the first place, I am but a passing visitor here, and but little acquainted with the forest and the country around; and then, I will candidly confess, that I do not approve of the proceedings of the Regulators, which but too often lead to excesses."

"How, sir!" exclaimed the Kentuckian, somewhat irritated. "You will confess, I hope, that we here know best where the shoe pinches us?"

"Certainly, certainly!" replied Brown, in a friendly tone; "I do not venture to pronounce an opinion on that point, but at the same time I reserve to myself the right of regulating my own actions."

"As for you gentlemen who are always skipping from one State to another, a man can never know how matters stand with you," said Heathcote, casting a somewhat scornful sidelong glance at the young man. "To-day you are in Missouri, to-morrow in Texas, and you everywhere find friends and acquaintances; and it is, perhaps, out of regard for your friends, that you refuse to join us?"

"Mr. Heathcote," replied Brown seriously, yet still with calmness and civility, "I am unwilling to understand your allusion, for I feel that it can not apply to me. As to my actions—as to my journeys from one State to another—I owe an account of them to no man but myself."

The other farmers now joined in the conversation, and prevented Heathcote from saying anything further which could wound the young man's feelings. He had become a great favorite with them all; while, on the other hand, they feared their leader rather than esteemed him.

"Come in, gentlemen! come in!" cried Roberts, who was standing at the house-door: "you must content yourselves with what I have had prepared for you in haste, for I suppose you don't want to wait till dinner-time; so take your seats and help yourselves."

The men did not need a second invitation, and after they had greeted the women of the house, they took their places around the well-spread table without further ceremony, nay, even without laying aside the numerous deadly weapons with which they were armed; they were just about to fall to, when Rawson, who was standing beside Mrs. Roberts near the fire, stepped to the table, folded his hands, and began to say grace.

The farmers, many of whom were Methodists (and even the others respected the custom of the house), laid down their knives and gazed devoutly upon their empty plates. Heathcote on the contrary looked angrily up at the preacher who did not appear to observe him, but calmly proceeded with the exercise of his duty as he called it.

But for the presence of the women, the ire

of the rude man would have broken forth on this occasion; he controlled it, however, or, at least, spared it for a more suitable opportunity, and began his meal while the preacher was pronouncing the word, "Amen!" It is unnecessary to say that this conduct deeply offended Mrs. Roberts. She seated herself, greatly exasperated, in her rocking-chair, and muttered something about "rude and sinful men," which reached Rawson's ears alone, however, who having now returned to her side, nodded acquiescence with a sigh.

"Mrs. Roberts, haven't you a drop of whisky in the house?" asked Heathcote, after a short pause, as he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his leathern hunting-shirt; "we drank some at Bowitt's, but it was such d—d sharp stuff, that it burns my insides yet."

"I don't keep whisky," replied Mrs. Roberts, irritated anew, as well at the question addressed to her as at his profanity; "and Mr. Bowitt would do better not to allow such liquor in her house."

"Yes—I told her so myself," laughed Heathcote, who either did not or would not understand the old dame's meaning; "it's scandalous. At the peddler's on the Petit-Jean, she could buy the best liquor in the world, genuine Monongahela, for a dollar a gallon."

"Mr. Heathcote might see," said Rawson, mildly, "that this conversation is not exactly to Mrs. Roberts's taste."

"Mr. Rawson would do well to mind his own business," said Heathcote, sharply.

"I have given the horses a little corn, gentlemen," cried old Roberts, who now returned from the stable with Harper and Brown.

"Thank you! thank you!" replied Smith and Fanning, happy at having a pretext for rising from the table, and interrupting a conversation which was likely to end unpleasantly.

Smith lingered, for a moment, as the other men left the house, and said to Mrs. Roberts, in a good-natured tone:

"You mustn't take it amiss in him, Mrs. Roberts; we have ridden hard this morning, and when we stopped at Bowitt's, Heathcote drank a little more, perhaps, than was good for him."

Mrs. Roberts made no reply, but rocked away so much the more violently. Rawson on the other hand, thanked the man for his good intention, and assured him that he had not the slightest feeling of ill-will against Heathcote. "He is a hasty young man," he continued, smiling good-naturedly, "and does not mean all he says."

"I shall be much obliged to him if he will never honor my house with his presence again," said Mrs. Roberts, suddenly breaking out; "I bring up my child in the fear of God, and I don't like to have a bad example set her within these walls."

"But, mother," said Marion, interposing.

"Nor that pious people," continued Mrs. Roberts, without heeding the interruption, "who preach the pure word of the Gospel, should be insulted under my roof—say that to Mr. Heathcote!" And the good dame began to rock anew, as if she had resolved to try how far she could go, without overturning her chair.

Smith, a quiet, peaceable man, and himself a Methodist, hated too completely in Mrs. Roberts's views to offer any remonstrances; he walked in silence toward the door, in front of which the others had seated themselves, partly upon chairs, partly upon troughs and logs of wood, and were conversing of the subject that most nearly interested them, to wit, the horse-stealing, which had, of late, increased in an alarming degree.

"The scoundrels must have an accomplice in this part of the country, otherwise I can't understand how it's possible for them to lead us always astray," said Mullins.

"Yes, but where do they take stolen beasts to? that's the riddle!" cried Roberts; "a horse isn't a bird that flies above the ground, without leaving a track."

"Only have patience!" said Heathcote; only have patience! everything has its end, and we shall yet catch the rogues when they least expect it; but then, d—n me, if I'll spare one of the hounds! It's scandalous that they abolished capital punishment for horse-stealing here in Arkansas last year. That's saying to the people in plain words: "Now, help yourselves, we won't do it any longer."

"I don't know, but it seems hard to take a man's life on account of a horse," said Brown, interposing.

"Hard? the d—l!" cried Heathcote, thrusting his long knife into the bark of the log upon which he was seated; "the man who steals my horse steals a part of myself—I have just sold three, and I have the money now about me—it is, as I may say, all that I have in the world If any man had stolen the horses, he would have ruined me, blasted all my prospects, and that is worse than if he had shot me through the head. No! death to the scoundrels! only let them see that we are in earnest, and Arkansas will soon be clear of them, that is of those we don't hang."

"You seem to set but little value upon a man's life," said Brown.

"Very little," replied Heathcote, repeating the movement with his knife.

"You don't rate your own very high, then?" said Harper, laughing; "eh? otherwise you wouldn't set it against that of every vagabond."

"High enough to let a man taste nine inches of cold steel, if I thought he might be dangerous to me!" cried Heathcote, glancing wildly around the circle. "This is a free country, and every one has his own views, and d—n me if I don't maintain mine—that's certain! Aha! there's Mr. Rawson again," he continued, scornfully, as he remarked the grave figure of the preacher, standing on the threshold with his hat upon his head, and his Bible under his arm; "one of those sneaks, who wear sheep's clothing, and only let the fox peep through now and then."

Rawson turned to the negro-boy, who at this moment approached the house, and asked him to bring his horse, but Heathcote, irritated by the indifference of the preacher, who feigned not to have heard him, leaped up, and cried angrily:

"Well, Mr. Brimstone, I should think I deserved an answer, even if I am a sinner."

But before Rawson could reply, Brown sprung up, caught Heathcote by the collar, and hurled him violently upon his seat, that he rolled backward over the log, and lay, for a moment, half-stunned by his fall. The rest started up in affright, for the Kentuckian, grasping the knife which had fallen near him, leaped over the log, and was about to grapple with his assailant, when the latter, without stirring an inch from the spot, held a pistol toward him. Heathcote, who had supposed him unarmed, recoiled, and was about to seize his rifle, but the others grasped his arm, and cried, with one voice:

"No murder! no murder here!"

"Back!" roared Heathcote, with a terrible imprecation; "back! Let me get at the rascal—that calls for blood—his heart's blood—let me go, I say!"

"Let him go!" said Brown, thrusting his pistol into his pocket, and drawing from beneath his waistcoat a knife similar to that which Heathcote carried; "let him go, and we will soon see who is the best man."

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Harper, do not let them fight!" cried Marion, rushing, pale and breathless from the house, and grasping the old man's hand; "the furious Heathcote will kill him."

"Be calm, my dear child," replied Harper, in a soothing tone; "and above all things go back into the house—this is no place for a young girl—when the bullet has once left the barrel, no one knows what it may hit."

"He will kill him!" cried the maiden, weeping.

"Whom? Rawson? No—his quarrel is with my nephew."

Marion hid her face in her handkerchief, and suffered Rawson, who now approached, to lead her into the house.

"Back! I say!" cried Heathcote, in the highest excitement; "give me my rifle—I'll shoot the dog through the heart!"

"Let him go!" exclaimed Brown, for his blood was now up; "let him go! he has knives enough about him, to venture an honest stand-up fight. Back, then, men of Arkansas! would you prevent an equal combat?"

"Very well," said Mullins, "you may fight it out together; but he sha'n't have his rifle—we will have no murder—a fair fight is a different thing."

The next moment Heathcote found himself at liberty. The recently so furious Kentuckian, however, seemed considerably cooled by the calm and fearless glance of his antagonist, and although he clutched his knife convulsively in his hand, and cast fierce glances toward Brown, who firmly awaited his attack, yet he stood as

if rooted to the spot. A painful silence now ensued; the men were ranged in a circle around the two opponents, scarcely venturing to breathe, while Marion, standing upon the threshold of the door, gazed with pale cheeks and quivering lips at the group, and with her hands folded upon her breast, awaited with deathlike anguish the termination of the fearful scene.

Heathcote now found himself in a perplexing position; he evidently feared the steel of his foeman, but still more the mockery or scornful laughter of his comrades, with which he expected to be greeted, if he refused the offered combat. Friends now interposed, however, and stepping between the two antagonists, separated them.

"Come, Heathcote," said Fanning, "you're both in the wrong, and it's a sin and a shame for two honest fellows to hack each other's bodies, when so many knaves are running at large in the woods, for them to use their knives upon. Come, it's time for us to be off, and then it isn't right to disturb these good people here on Sunday, when they have treated us so kindly."

"That's all that has prevented me from chastising yonder milksop," said Heathcote, grinding his teeth, "but wait, fellow! I shall find you, and may God be gracious to you, when you once come within range of my rifle!"

"Heathcote! Heathcote!" cried Mullins, in a tone of warning, "those are dangerous—very dangerous words."

"Let him boast," said Brown, with a scornful laugh, as he thrust his knife into its sheath; "it's the only pleasure that he has in life."

"Come, Bill!" said Harper, drawing Brown toward the house, "let the fellow go—you have done enough for your honor, and I am delighted that my sister's son has acted so bravely—but think of the women—Marion has just swooned."

"Marion swooned?" cried Brown, rushing toward the house. "Well," he then said, pausing suddenly, "Mr. Rawson is with her—I didn't think of that—she will recover."

The Regulators had, in the meanwhile, ridden away, and Rawson also prepared to return home. Harper, on the contrary, accepted Roberts's invitation to remain for the night, in order to set out the next morning upon the hunt which had been agreed upon, and to pay a visit to old Barker, of whom he had heard so much.

Rawson uttered a long prayer before he mounted his horse, partly to implore the forgiveness of the Most High for this terrible desecration of his holy Sabbath, partly to thank him that this scene had passed without bloodshed. Before he left, however, he approached Brown, and said:

"You have taken my part to-day, and I thank you; but if that man thinks of revenge, fear nothing; Heaven will protect you; depend upon its aid."

"I thank you, Mr. Rawson, I thank you!" replied Brown, heartily, "but I depend more upon the man's cowardice and my own strength than upon anything besides. He'll keep out of my way, you may be sure of that; and as I am not quarrelsome, the matter will probably end here."

CHAPTER V.

BROWN AND MARION.

RAWSON had ridden away "to preach the word of the Lord in another settlement," as he had said, and Marion was reclining, pale and exhausted, upon a chair. Now and then big drops coursed down her cheeks and fell softly upon her delicate fingers, which she held folded upon her lap; deep sorrow as visible in her soft features, and her lips trembled convulsively.

Harper, Roberts and Brown were seated near the hearth, where a negro-girl was occupied in lighting a fire, rather from habit than for protection against the cold. Mrs. Roberts was standing by her daughter, stroking her auburn hair.

"Come, come, my child! away with all sorrow and care," she said, endeavoring to soothe the lovely girl; "all is over; Mr. Rawson cannot meet the men again to day; he has taken an opposite direction—go out into the fresh air, and you will feel better; Mr. Brown, perhaps, will go with you, and take you a little walk. Why, you really have a fever—how flushed you look all at once—come, come—it's a shame for a great grown-up girl to cry."

At these last words Marion concealed her

face upon her mother's bosom, and sobbed aloud.

"Will you not walk a ways with this foolish child, Mr. Brown?" continued the matron. "I wish Mr. Rawson could have remained with us to-day, but the service of God before that of man."

At the first intimation that his services were desired, Brown had risen, and he now approached the young girl with some embarrassment, indeed, to offer her his arm.

"So—that's right, my child!" cried the mother, encouraging her, "that's brave—hold up your head—you'll feel better when you are out; and, Mr. Brown, let her have a brisk walk, to stir her blood a little. God pardon the wicked men for causing such a disturbance in the peaceful houses of his servants."

Harper had, in the meanwhile, grown very thoughtful; he gazed, in silence, at the wet, crackling wood, while Roberts, who had begun a conversation concerning the late quarrel, and in his usual desultory way, had got into the Revolutionary war, was just commencing an anecdote of Washington, as the two young people left the house and walked slowly and silently along the broad road, which led up the river to the upper settlements.

The sun was fast sinking to the horizon, and the shadows of the gigantic trees fell dark across their path; numbers of sportive paroquets fluttered screaming from tree to tree; gray squirrels sprung, in bold leaps, from branch to branch, or gnawed upon a hoarded nut, while softly and carefully lifting its handsome head, a hind crossed the way with its fawn, paused for a moment, glancing up and down along the road, and then slowly disappeared in the thicket, as if confident that no danger threatened her from the approaching pair. Calm peace lay upon the surrounding landscape, and the mighty tops of the pines and oaks rustled majestically in the fresh south-east wind.

"We are really greatly indebted to you, Mr. Brown," said Marion, at last breaking the painful silence. "You took the part of Mr.—Mr. Rawson so kindly and bravely—and exposed yourself to such great danger."

"Not so great as you think, perhaps, Miss Roberts," replied Brown, hesitating; "the man is a coward, and sought a quarrel with Mr. Rawson, because he had no fear of his—because he is a preacher, and could not take it up."

"You meant to say something else—speak out—do you think Mr. Rawson a coward?"

"He is a preacher, Miss Roberts, and would get an ill name in the country, were he to pick quarrels with every one."

"Not pick quarrels, but—no matter! you took his part—I am greatly pleased that you are such good friends. Where did you become acquainted with him?"

"Acquainted? friend? Miss Roberts, I scarcely know Mr. Rawson; to-day is the first time that we ever exchanged a word together."

"And you risked your life for him?" said Marion, quickly, while she paused in wonder and gazed in the young man's large blue eyes.

"I heard that—he—was betrothed to you—I saw you turn pale, and—I am rather hasty in my temper—I felt indignant at the man's rudeness—I was somewhat quicker than I ought to have been—but, good heavens, Miss Roberts, you are growing ill again! will you not sit down for a moment upon yonder log?"

Marion suffered Brown to lead her to one of the trees, which had been felled in clearing the road, and had been rolled aside there to crumble beneath the tooth of time. A long pause ensued again. At last Marion asked in a low tone:

"You are going to leave us, Mr. Brown? My father told me just now, that you intended to join the Texans in their war for independence?"

"Yes, Miss Roberts, it will be better for me to find some employment of that kind—there is many a thing that I wish to forget, and for that, war is the most fitting occupation; perhaps, too, some kind—I shall probably make a bargain with your father for a horse."

"You do not seem to be happy," said the sweet girl, almost in a whisper, while she gazed earnestly and thoughtfully in his face. "You lived a long while in Kentucky?"

"I left Kentucky with a light heart."

"And has Arkansas brought you misfortune? I am sorry to hear that—till now I have loved the State so well."

"You will still love it. In a few weeks you will wed the man of your choice, and with one

that we love, even the wilderness would be a paradise; how much more, then, the lovely forests and the enchanting climate of Arkansas. Ah, there are some very happy people in this world!"

"And whom do you count among the number?"

"Rawson!" exclaimed the young man, and then started at the boldness of the word.

"Let us walk on, Mr. Brown," said Marion, rising quickly, "we shall soon be obliged to return—it is almost sunset."

They proceeded onward, for a while again, in silence.

"You live all alone with your uncle, do you not?" asked Marion, at last, after a long pause, "my mother told me so, at least."

"Yes," replied Brown, "we lead a bachelor's life, and a sad life it is!"

"Your uncle is a pleasant man—always cheerful—always ready with a jest; and then there is something so honest and open in his glance, I liked him the first moment that I saw him; yet I have never seen him so grave as he was this afternoon; and you seem to me very serious to-day—those wicked Regulators are the cause of it all."

"Mr. Rawson will settle in the county here, I suppose? I heard Mr. Roberts say that he was only waiting to receive a part of his property."

"Yes," said Marion in a whisper, "my father insisted upon that—father was always opposed to the match."

"That seems hardly right in your father, Miss Roberts; he should not stand in the way of the happiness of his own child."

"But he maintained that I would not be happy," said Marion, smiling sadly.

"Is not love the greatest happiness on earth?"

"I have heard so."

"You have heard so! Do you not love your betrothed then?"

"My mother's whole heart was fixed upon this union, won by the devout conduct of the pious man; she believed that she could not better provide for me than if she could induce me to give him my hand. I saw many men in the forest here, but no one pleased me, or made an impression upon me; the rude and boisterous hunters, the reckless raftsmen, the roving trappers, and even the uncultivated farmers of the neighborhood, were not calculated to gain my heart. Mr. Rawson was the first to win my esteem by his quiet and friendly manners; he came often into this part of the country, preached frequently here, and my mother learned to value and esteem him. It was she who persuaded him to settle among us, and to take a wife—he asked for my hand, and mother promised it to him. I had never thought of a union with him; I had always looked upon him rather as a friend, than as a lover, and the proposal surprised me. And then there was—I can confess it to you, perhaps—something in his eye which inspired me with fear, when I looked up to him quickly and unexpectedly; but when I gazed upon him long and earnestly, there was something again so mild and soft in his features, that at last he gained my confidence and friendship. Urged by my mother's ceaseless importunities, I finally yielded. But my father did not favor the marriage; he could not bear the still and quiet man, and several serious scenes passed between him and mother on the subject. To speak candidly, it was indifferent to me which carried their point, for I thought that I could be happy with Mr. Rawson, but not unhappy without him; so that when my father yielded, and only insisted that Mr. Rawson should show that he possessed property enough to support a wife, without depending upon preaching alone, I promised Mr. Rawson to be his wife, and, as he told us to-day, he expects in a few weeks to receive a sum sufficient, not only to purchase the land on which he lives, but also to buy cattle, and the necessary farming utensils. Then nothing will stand in the way of his wishes, and—I shall be his wife."

Marion uttered these last words in a voice so low and tremulous that Brown stopped involuntarily and gazed upon the maiden; she had turned her head away and her bonnet concealed her face.

"You will be happy," he said, in a whisper, and a deep sigh broke from his bosom.

"We must return, Mr. Brown," said Marion, after a short pause; "look, the tops of the trees are growing red; the sun will soon set and night comes quickly in these thick woods; mother will be uneasy."

The two young people now retraced their steps toward the house, and after a few moments Marion said, with a smile:

"I have in these few words related to you the whole history of my life—a wonderful proof of my confidence in you; but consider, as Mr. Rawson says, awakens confidence, and it would be but right and reasonable if I should require the same from you; that is, if you have no secrets to keep, which would hardly be safe with so talkative a creature as I am."

"My life has passed quite uniformly," said Brown, "almost too uniformly. Born in Virginia, my father removed, while I was still a child, into Kentucky, where he founded the first settlements with Daniel Boone. I was scarcely strong enough to carry a rifle when I was obliged to fight against the Indians, who, at that time harassed us day and night. For a long while we bade defiance to all their craft and strength, but on one unhappy night they attacked my father when from home and killed him. At break of day we were awakened by their war-cries and the crackling of the flames, which were consuming our cabin. Our whole family fell beneath the tomahawks of the redskins; I alone escaped their search, as by a miracle. I fled and reached the nearest settlement; but here, landing together, we drove the savages, fighting, from their lurking-places, and at last compelled them to leave us in peace. Much blood flowed in those times, much innocent blood. I do not know that the whites were right in proceeding, in the outset, so severely against the natives, but it is true the savages avenged themselves again almost too fearfully, and this could not be endured."

"Afterward I went with my uncle into Missouri, where we lived for several years, and as we heard of the rich soil and the healthy climate on the La Fave, we resolved to remove hither. My uncle is always urging me to marry, for the lonely life that we lead here is wearisome to us both, but I never met with a being who equaled the idea that I had formed of my future wife. I could not resolve to marry without being impelled by affection—alas, I had, indeed, a presentiment of what love is, but still I did not know the power of that passion. Late one evening—it was in—Missouri—I was riding through a part of the country which I had never visited before; the sky was veiled with clouds; I had lost my way, and came to a dwelling where I lost still more my repose, my peace of mind forever."

"I saw a young girl in this dwelling—I saw—but wherefore describe the angel whom I was doomed to find only to know that she never could be mine—that maiden, Miss Roberts, was betrothed. I remained for a few days longer in Missouri and then went to Texas—went to Arkansas, I would say; this then is, perhaps, the cause of my frequent gloom, which I beg you kindly to excuse. It is hard when we think we have found happiness, to see it vanish in misty shadows. Alas, and the dream was so fair, so beautiful!"

Marion bowed her head, and hot tears trickled from beneath her long silken lashes, but Brown did not remark them, for close at hand, in the dense thicket of sumach and sassafras bushes, a rustling, crashing sound was heard; a stealthy step stirred the dry moss, and at the very moment when the young man, foreboding approaching danger, paused, and reached his hand toward his weapon, the dense branches opened close before them, and an enormous panther appeared in the road. The beast glanced not with alarm, but savagely and insolently at the young pair, who had ventured to disturb his solitude. With a single cry, the terrified maiden cast herself into Brown's arms, who supported her with his left hand, while, with the right, he drew from his pocket the pistol, which he had, a few hours before, aimed at the rude Kentuckian.

The panther, in the meanwhile, swung its tail, half-angrily, half-sportively, in the air, lashing its sides as it irresolute whether to attack or to retreat. Brown took caution at the animal's bend, as it circled, about to leap, and fired. Disturbed by the trembling of the lovely creature whom he held in his arms—for being a practical hunting-man, the sight of the panther did not move him with the slightest fear—he missed the beast's head, and the ball grazed its shoulder, lodged in its loins. The animal leaped aloft, and then, as if this unexpected salute had damped its ardor, it uttered a sharp, shrill cry, which was answered close at hand, and bounded into the thicket; yet the streak of blood which it left,

proved that the shot had not been entirely ineffective.

"The danger is over, Miss Roberts. The boar has fled," said Brown, softly, while he gently tried to raise the trembling form that rested upon his bosom. "My shot has scared it—Marion! what is the matter? Marion! compose yourself—for Heaven's sake, Marion!"

The long repressed feelings of the ardent maiden of Arkansas, now broke forth with violence from the heart which, until this moment, she had kept closely locked; sobbing, she leaned upon the shoulder of the young man, and whispered softly, and in deep sorrow:

"Oh, I am very, very wretched!"

"Marion, be calm!" exclaimed the young man, filled with the deepest anguish. "Alas, that the happiest hour of my life should be the one which reveals to me all my wretchedness at a glance! Yes, Marion, I love you, love you with the warmth of a heart that knows of no happiness more upon the earth, than that of calling you mine, that sees in you alone, the star which could shed light upon my future career, and now looks back at the last, bright gleam, as it disappears from the horizon of my hopes, never to rise again!"

"It is time for us to separate," he continued, in a low and suppressed voice. "I must not remain here; my presence would only render us both doubly wretched; to-morrow I leave Arkansas; in the din of battle I will try to drown all memory of you—forget you, Marion!—I never can forget you!"

The lovely girl leaned sobbing upon his bosom, and for a long time the lovers held each other in a sad and silent embrace. Brown, at last, led her to the fallen tree on which they had previously been seated, and Marion, overcome with woe concealed her face in her hands.

"Do you love the man to whom you are betrothed?" asked Brown, in a low tone, taking her hand, and drawing it gently toward him; "have you ever loved him?"

"Never! never!" replied Marion, pressing her hand to her heart. "I have acted inconsiderately. I knew no one toward whom I felt more kindly than toward him, for my mother esteemed, nay, almost revered him, and every one said that he was a good and excellent man. I thought that the emotion which I felt for him might be love. Then you appeared, I saw you, I remarked your free and open manner, I learned to know your true and faithful heart, and—I was wretched; the future rose before me in sad and dreary images; a life of endless sorrow seemed to await me at the side of the man whom I could no longer love, even if he had not proved himself so cowardly and unmanly as he did to-day; a dark mist enwrapped all my dreams of joy and happiness, and with you the last light of life bid me farewell.—But it must be so.—Farewell," she continued, rising; "even our lingering here is sin. I am betrothed to that man—I am his betrothed bride. Let this, therefore, be the last time that we meet—it is better for us both."

"You are right, Marion—we must part—I owe this to your heart, to your honor; I will but lead you back to the house, and then I will never cross your path again. But suffer me to take with me into my sad and joyless exile, a memento of this hour; grant me a lock of your hair that my eye may have an object upon which it may rest, when my heart sends up prayers for you and for your welfare?"

Marion bent her head down toward him, and with his sharp hunting-knife, he easily severed a slender tress from her brow.

"Thanks, Marion!" he then whispered. "my best and warmest thanks, and may Heaven strengthen you upon your long and thorny path! May Rawson render you as happy as you deserve to be, and when you pray to God, think, at times, upon the poor hunter, who then, perhaps, may have dyed the land of freedom, the youthful Texas, with his warm heart's blood. Farewell, and may God protect you!"

In the deepest sorrow he clasped his arm about the beloved maiden, and their lips met, for the first time, in a long, long farewell kiss. Marion then tore herself from his arms, and hastened toward the house. Harper and Roberts met them upon their way; they had heard the shot, and feared that some accident might have happened to them. Roberts now gave his daughter his arm, while Harper and Brown followed them at a short distance.

"Uncle," said Brown, after they had walked

onward, for a while, in silence, side by side; "uncle—I set out early to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense!" cried Harper, stopping short, and gazing steadfastly at his nephew; "nonsense!" he then repeated, yet with an uncertain, half-doubting voice, "and where would you go?"

"To Texas."

"Would you leave your old uncle here in the lurch? Is that right?"

"I must go, uncle."

"You must! And what compels you?"

Brown turned away his face, pressing the old man's hand convulsively in his own.

"And must I then really remain here, lonely and sad in my hut? Bill, that is hard—that isn't quite right in you—I'll disinherit you, Bill," he added, smiling sadly, after a few seconds—"I'll really disinherit you."

Brown grasped his hand, and gazed in his face with eyes veiled with tears. The old man was poor, and all that the two now possessed together, in land, cattle, and money, belonged truly to the nephew.

"Never fear, uncle—your old age shall be provided for; you know that eight days ago I received a letter from my lawyer in Cincinnati. I have gained my lawsuit, and the money must soon be paid to me; I will write to Woolsey this very evening, and direct him to forward it to your address. You will make what use of it you please until I return, and—if I never return—well, we will speak of that at another time. Early to-morrow morning I shall ride to the Petit-Jean, and from there across to Morrison's Bluff on the Arkansas, where I have business to attend to. In a week I shall pass your house on my way to Texas; in the meanwhile bargain for me with Mr. Roberts for the bay."

"Halloo, there!" cried Roberts, who had now reached the house with his daughter; "halloo, there! you walk as if you had lead in your shoes—come, Brown, supper's ready."

"And are you really in earnest?" said Harper, addressing his nephew.

"I shall leave here at once. I have the letter to write, and bullets to cast, as well as to bake some bread and prepare some provisions."

"But will you be sure and return in a week?"

"Here is my hand upon it—and then I must stop for the horse, you know. Farewell, uncle! be satisfied, in a week you will see me again; but do not tell Roberts that you expect me. I—I might not have time to visit him, and he would, perhaps, be vexed about it."

"Halloo, Brown! Why, Harper, what is Brown doing in the stable?" asked Roberts, as the latter returned alone to the house; "supper's getting cold—my wife is already grumbling about it."

"He insists upon going," said Harper, sorrowfully. "Heaven only knows what has got into his head."

"Going! this evening?" exclaimed Mr. and Mrs. Roberts; "but why?"

"He has business to-morrow morning on the Petit-Jean, and he must first return home, for he would be too late if he should stay here all night."

"Singular that this occurred to him so suddenly," said Mrs. Roberts. "This afternoon he promised to spend the night here."

"He spoke to me about it while we were walking," said Marion, as she turned to lay aside her bonnet. "He said that he was sorry he could not remain here. He must have some pressing business that calls him away."

"Yes, and I think I had better accompany him," cried Harper. "We have no cook in the house but myself, and I must see to his provisions. He may, perhaps, be absent for some days."

"But, Mr. Harper," cried Mrs. Roberts, half-offended, "I really can't understand you two—supper's ready—you must eat a morsel first."

"I thank you, Mrs. Roberts, I thank you! Early to-morrow morning, if you have no objection, I will invite myself to breakfast, for I must go with you to the hunt, Roberts. Tim, bring me my horse—he quick!" he cried, turning to a little negro. "So then—at six o'clock I will be here—shall I bring the Indian with me?"

"He can be of great service to us in tracking the hogs," said Roberts.

"But, Mr. Harper, do take a cup of coffee before you go—you will find nothing warm when you get home."

"That's an undoubted fact, Mrs. Roberts," replied the old man, as he stepped to the table,

and drained the offered cup of hot coffee. "It's too true—a bachelor's life is a wretched life. I think I must get married."

"Hal-ha! ha!" laughed Roberts, "that's a capital ideal ride around here in the neighborhood and court the girl! If you only put on the new, light blue frock-coat, that the tailor in Little Rock made for you—you told me once what it cost; the tailors charge monstrously in Little Rock; when I was down there lately—"

"Good-night, Mr. Roberts! good-night, ladies!" cried Brown, from before the house, where he had stopped with his horse.

"But, Mr. Brown—do come in a minute, and drink a cup of coffee—your uncle—"

"I thank you heartily, madam, but I am not thirsty—good-night, all!"

"Stop, boy! I'm going with you," cried Harper.

"You, uncle?"

"To be sure—ah, there is my horse! So then, early to-morrow morning—and, Roberts, don't take that small-bored rifle with you again—cast balls this evening for the other—it's wretched shooting with such a miserable piece of lead. Good night all!" he continued, as he mounted his horse, and seated himself firmly in the saddle; "good-night!"

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts were standing at the door; Marion had taken her place behind them.

"Good-night!" cried Brown, once again waving his hat—once more he saw the form of her whom he loved, he knew that her eyes were fastened upon him; for the last time he uttered a farewell, and at once plunged his spurs so furiously into the flanks of his faithful beast, that it reared aloft, and then with a few rapid bounds disappeared from the sphere of the light, which streamed through the open door of the hut.

"Stop there!" cried Harper, calling to his nephew, "are you mad!—do you want to break your neck? Ride slowly, if you expect me to keep up with you—a sad fellow that—a crazy lad!" and they long heard the old man rail and remonstrate as he urged on his steed to overtake the spur-fretted, bounding beast which his nephew rode.

"Singular!" said Mrs. Roberts, as she took her seat at the supper-table with her husband and daughter; "very singular! that was strange conduct in them both. Could they end the holy Sabbath in no better way than to ride home, and—"

"Nonsense, wife!" cried Roberts, interrupting her. "As for the lad Brown, the business with that fellow, Heatbroke, is still dancing in his head—I can't blame him for it, for the knave threatened in plain terms to shoot him wherever he met him, and he's the man to keep his word in such a matter."

"Do you really think so, father?" asked Marion turning deadly pale.

"Well, the lad will stand up to him manfully," continued her father, without remarking her emotion; "'tis a stout, bravo fellow—his heart is in the right place. Since the time when his uncle came into this part of the country—it's now about six weeks—I had just finished fencing in the new pieces of land—capital land that—it will yield a noble crop this year, especially if the weather continues fine, and the sun set very clear to-day, and perhaps—"

"Won't you have another cup of coffee, Roberts?" asked his wife.

"No, I thank you."

"Well, then, we will have evening prayer," said the good dame, as she rose and took from the little mantle a carefully-preserved copy of the Holy Scriptures.

Oh, with what devotion did the poor unhappy maiden pray on this evening; low ardently did she entreat from the Almighty happiness and repose for the man whom she loved so warmly; and when, at last, she sought her couch, she bedewed the snow-white pillow with countless tears, and, like a child tired with weeping, fell asleep with folded hands, and with Brown's name upon her lips.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following morning dawned clear and bright. In the east the first pale beams were creeping over the hills; the whip-poor-will was still sounding its sad and monotonous note; the owls answered each other from the dense branches of the forest, while here and there was heard the gobbling of an angry turkey-cock; the smaller birds awoke in the bushes;

and in a solitary farmyard, which lay deep in the forest, old chanticleer sounded his shrill morning strain out into the cool, refreshing air. Abundant dew had fallen during the night; on every blade of grass hung a string of liquid crystals, and the big bright drops fell audibly upon the damp, leaf-covered earth; with all this the blossoms and flowers exhaled so sweet a perfume that the bosom expanded more freely, and inhaled with delight the balsam's odor.

Two horsemen were riding slowly along the county road. They were Harper and Brown, both clad to-day in the garb of the Western hunter, a leathern hunting-shirt, leggings, and moccasins, with rifles on their shoulders, and their broad hunting-knives at their belts. Brown had confessed all to his uncle; it would have been a weight upon his heart, had he kept silence toward his paternal friend, and without changing a word, each busied with his own thoughts, they proceeded onward, until near the salt lick, where, on the preceding day, Harper had caught the stag. From this spot, a narrow side-path turned to the right across the ridge of mountains, toward the Cypress stream, and from there across to the Petit-Jean, and Brown paused here to take leave of his uncle.

"Well, good-by, my lad," said the latter, at last, after they had shaken hands heartily—"arrange your business, and then return with a more cheerful heart. You will soon forget the girl. Well, well, I own it may be hard—but, good heavens, a man forgets so many things; I could tell you a right sorrowful story on that subject, but we are both too much out of tune at present. In the meanwhile, I will attend to every thing here that you wish attended to; I will buy the bay for you; I will get the blankets at Little Rock, day after to-morrow, myself, or else have them sent by a sure hand; you shall have the ball-pouch, too, and by that time Alapaha will have dressed the skin for the new hunting-shirt. Well, then, God keep you, my boy—come back soon, and be on your guard; and if you come across the Regulators—the fellows have ridden up that way—don't get into a quarrel with them again; it's of no use, and will do you no credit."

"Never fear, uncle! the fellow will keep out of my path, and if he thrusts himself across it, I shall know how to clear the way. But now, good-by—if the money from Cincinnati comes during my absence, well, you know what to do with it—farewell! in a week I shall be back again, and will you not bear a last greeting to Marion—a parting greeting?—then I will try to forget her. Good-by, uncle! when we meet again, I hope both will have regained our former cheerfulness."

The men separated, and Harper paused upon the road, until the tall and vigorous form of his nephew had disappeared behind the abrupt mountain ridge; then, shaking his head significantly, he pursued his way, whistling in a frightfully sharp and piercing key, the melody of an old song, without having the slightest regard to time or tune; however, still the muscles of his face labored powerfully, and it was evident that the poor old man was endeavoring to drown his sorrow at his nephew's unhappiness and departure. Soon he reached Roberts's dwelling again.

Here, all was bustle and animation; two hunters of the neighborhood had come to join in the sport, and Harper was welcomed with a loud "halloo!" The men shouted, the dogs barked, the geese and ducks cackled, so that old chanticleer, affrighted at the noise, flew fluttering upon the roof, and gazed down upon the boisterous group, turning his head from side to side, in the greatest astonishment.

Breakfast was ready; it consisted of hot coffee, with sweet cream and brown sugar, fried pork, and bears' ribs, venison, pickled cucumbers, honey, and butter. The men needed but little persuasion to fall to, and soon the empty dishes proved the relish with which they had dispatched their meal. Each then hung his powder-horn about him, took his rifle, and mounted his horse, which stood tied before the door, or held by a negro. Before following the others, Harper approached Marion, who sat near the chimney gazing thoughtfully at the fire, and pressed her hand in silence. The startled maiden looked up to him, but as she met his glance, she read therein the parting greeting of her beloved, and breathing a heavy sigh, she concealed her face in her hands. The next moment the hunters were all mounted

and ready to start. The tone of Roberts's horn called to the spot all the dogs, which now leaped, barking and whining, around the horses, and on dashed the train, shouting joyously, into the green, blossoming, glorious forest.

All Harper's sadness disappeared from the moment that his horse stepped beneath the dark shade of the trees; he was now a hunter only, and in Arkansas, a hunter has no time for care, anxiety or sorrow.

The course of the hunters lay to the right, over the mountain-ridge which separates the waters of the La Fave from those of the Cypress; they rode along this little stream to its source, then crossed toward the Petit-Jean until they reached the broad and fruitful valley through which the latter flowed.

"Where can the Indian keep himself, Harper?" said Roberts, at last. "You told us he would meet us on the Petit-Jean."

"Heaven only knows where the fellow is roaming! Well, our trail is broad enough, let him follow that," said Harper.

"But, Curtis, what's the matter with Juno, there? Look how she wags her tail. If Poppy were only here! The cursed bunglers are upon a false track."

At these words Roberts leaped from his horse and hastened to the place where Juno, a young dog, was eagerly scenting a fresh track. A bear had passed here this morning on his way to the river, which was about two miles distant, and had probably sat for a short time on this spot, for the dog could not be induced to leave it.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried Curtis, who had dismounted in the meanwhile, "that must have been a sturdy fellow, and heavy—see the deep prints of its paws. Our poor swine will have a hard time of it here; and yet—no, this here isn't a bear's track; a man has passed here—perhaps the Indian; and here's another—it couldn't be Assowaum; but where the deuce are the dogs? The bear can hardly have got over the river already—blow the horn again, Roberts."

The latter blew a few loud shrill notes upon the simple instrument, and soon a panting and rustling was heard in the bushes and the next moment Poppy, as the old hunter called him, leaped into a small open space at the edge of which the two men were standing. He was soon followed by the rest of the dogs, for Poppy was the leader of the pack, and they now ran whining around the place where they snuffed the traces of the enemy. A young hound now came upon the warm scent, uttered a sharp bark and darted like an arrow up the back track into the wood toward the upland; Poppy, led astray for the first time in many years, snuffed the fresh track and ambitious to lead the hunt, followed the course taken by the younger dog. The others were naturally no longer to be restrained, and with furious clamor they soon disappeared in the thicket, which, several hundred paces broad, ran along the foot of the hills.

In vain Roberts alternately shouted and blew his horn with such violence that the veins of his neck threatened to burst, his face swelled and turned purple; in vain the other hunters joined their cries to his; the pack did not or would not hear them.

"Toads and rattlesnakes!" cried old Roberts, now in a complete fury, and with wild rage he dashed his hunting-cap upon the ground, "the d—l take the varmint! there they go upon the back track—I never saw anything to match it! We ought to have a picture taken of this hunt."

"What has got into the infernal dogs?" grumbled Curtis.

"It was all the fault of the red dog," said the other hunter, a peddler from the Eastern States, who was lodging at Curtis's house, and wished to join, for once, in an Arkansas hunt, "the red dog first started off back to the hills."

"The red dog be d—d!" cried the exasperated Roberts. "It was Curtis's dog—the beast has no more idea of a bear's track than a sheep has of a Cherokee's. Curtis, if that dog was mine, I'd shoot him through the head."

"I only wish that Mrs. Roberts and Mr. Rawson were here, to hear you swear," cried Harper with a laugh.

"Mr. Rawson may be—may mind his own business; I shouldn't restrain myself particularly if he was here."

"And if Mrs. Roberts was here?"

"She isn't very likely to be in the swamps

on the Petit-Jean. But it's a fact; here we stand like a bear in a plum-garden, and so don't know which way to turn first. There isn't the smallest chance of the dogs coming back under three or four hours, and then they'll be as tired as the d—l."

"But your Poppy was stupid enough to follow," cried Curtis, angrily.

"Well, yes; when a beast dashes away after that sort, and makes such a din, as if it had found, Heaven knows what—well, Poppy, look out for the lash!"

"Hist!" cried Harper, suddenly, as he placed his right hand in the form of a funnel to his ear—"hist! I hear something that doesn't sound like the barking of dogs—ha, there it is again!" that's Assowaum; and I would bet my head that he has turned the varmint. Blow, Roberts, blow—he don't know exactly where we are."

Roberts now blew his horn again, and its tones were answered by a long-drawn cry, that seemed to come from the hills which lay at no great distance.

"Hurrah! that's Assowaum's voice, and if he has met the dogs, he'll bring them back with him. Poppy knows him well enough."

Harper was right, after about a quarter of an hour the Indian appeared driving the pack before him, which seemed unwilling to leave the track; Poppy however, he held in a slender leash made of twisted thongs.

"Halloo, Assowaum! where did you find the dog?" cried Roberts, joyfully, as he hastened to meet him.

"A big bear came over the mountain," said the Indian; deep tracks and not bony; had turned up no stones to look for worms, scratched no piece of rotten wood; his tracks lead to the river; there is a good bed there in the canebrake, and not many mosquitoes. Assowaum knows the place."

"But how did you get hold of the dogs?"

"When Assowaum finds the track of a bear, he knows which way he carries his nose; Poppy met me, and when he leaped up to me, I held him fast; when the bees swarm they follow one, the greatest, the wisest; so is it with the dogs; when the leader leaves the track, the others leave it too;" and spreading out his arms, he pointed around to the pack, which, with the exception of a few young dogs, had gathered about the hunters.

"A capital fellow, this Assowaum!" said Harper, rubbing his hands with an air of satisfaction; "a capital fellow! Put the bunglers now upon the right track, and see how like lightning they will—"

"Run back to the mountains," said Assowaum. "No—I will lead Poppy—the others will follow—when they are once on the way they will keep on."

The Indian's advice was immediately followed, and after proceeding a few steps, Poppy seemed to understand that he had just committed a blunder, for he hung his tail, and looked up sorrowfully to his guide. The latter did not yet trust him, however, but when he had led the dog onward for about two hundred paces, and finding that he could scarcely restrain him, he set him at liberty, and incited by his hunting cry, which echoed widely through the woods, the large and noble animal dashed, barking and yelling, upon the track, and followed by the baying pack, soon disappeared in the thicket.

"Now is the time to be in the saddle," cried old Roberts, whom the excitement of the moment seemed to have rendered younger by twenty years; "burra, Poppy! burra!" And he shouted forth the last syllable with such emphasis, that the very horses, infected by his ardor, bounded aloft, and then darted forward, obedient to his call.

The hunters now dashed through the thicket and swamp, over trees and pools, through places where the whole forest seemed bound together by a single web of thorny vines, until they reached the canebrake which bordered the stream, for a width of about three hundred paces. Thus far all had kept their seats tolerably well, the peddler alone excepted, who, at their first entrance into the thicket, was struck by a green brier or a grape-vine and brushed from his horse; he called in such lamentable tones to the hunters, that Harper actually drew upon his bridle. It was for a moment only, however, for the next instant his faithful beast felt the spur again. He were no Arkansas hunter, who, when following the warm, fresh scent of a bear, had remained to assist a fallen comrade.

Before penetrating the canebrake, however, the rest also were obliged to leave their horses, and, leaping from the saddle, they abandoned them to their fate, and made their way through the wild maze of creeping plants and cane, which, in many places barred their passage like actual walls, through which they were compelled to cut a path with their knives. The hunters had good cause, indeed, to push forward with such rapidity, for, in the midst of the thicket, and not far distant from them, they heard the most terrible noise imaginable. The dogs barked and howled, the dry cane crackled, the leaves rustled, and the men shouted to stimulate the combatants, all combining to raise a din, as if a hurricane was passing through the woods, or the wild huntsman of Germany, with his spectral pack, was performing his part in the primitive forests of America.

The bear had been brought to bay; the dogs had surprised him in his lair, where he had, probably, laid himself a short time before, and he must have risen so tardily, that the foremost dogs Poppy and Juno, were close upon his heels, before he could recover from his first a'm.

Juno was but a pup, and though excellent upon the track, in actual combat she was good for little; Poppy, on the other hand, somewhat more heavily built, knew no greater pleasure than that of taking a bear by the hind legs, for, with great prudence, he seldom trusted him very near the fore paws. As Bruin, with a furious leap, his nose thrust close to the ground, that he might glide beneath the maze of vines, was about to take leave of them; Poppy seized him before he was aware of it, and so rudely, that the beast, turned, grumbling, to shake off the assailant with his powerful paw. Poppy was far from waiting for this, however, for his only object was to retard the bear's progress, and, darting aside with the swiftness of lightning, he escaped the dangerous stroke; he repeated his assault, however, as soon as the fugitive turned the least dangerous part of his body toward him. It is true, he was unable to detain him long in this way, but now the remainder of the pack came dashing up to the spot, and it was necessary for Bruin to think seriously of making his retreat, if he wished to save his hide.

He dashed, therefore, toward the adjacent river, in which direction the thicket was the least penetrable; but again the furious pack swarmed around him; few, however, venturing actually to assail him. At last he found himself compelled to retreat to an open part of the wood, further down the stream, and to ensconce himself in a shallow "slue," the steep banks of which rendered it dangerous for the hounds to approach him, since if they attacked him here, they would have found it extremely difficult to escape the blows of his huge paws. By this means he defended himself for a long while against the fangs of his pursuers, but, on the other hand, the hunters had time to cut off his retreat, as the barking of the dogs kept them continually informed of the direction of the chase. At the very moment that the bear, now by no means in the best humor, was about to leap aside to the left, in order to make a second attempt to reach the stream, Roberts emerged from the thicket near by, raised his rifle and fired. At the same instant the crack of a second rifle was heard, and Curtis's ball whizzed through the air. Although both balls lodged in the animal's body, yet they seemed to produce but little impression upon him; he merely leaped up, uttered a faint groan, almost like a sigh, and then, with a mighty bound, reached the border of the slue, struck to the ground, with a stroke of his powerful paw, the dog that here assailed him, and hastened toward the river.

But in the meanwhile Roberts had profited by this interval also; with a leap which would have done honor to a panther, he bounded across the slue, and was close upon the animal's heels, with his drawn knife, as the latter gained the verge of the river. Here the report of a third rifle was heard, and at the same instant Roberts reached the panting, wounded beast, and plunged the broad blade into his loin. In the heat of the pursuit, however, the old hunter had not noticed the dangerous proximity in which he now stood to the stream, for, with a last effort, the bear raised himself upon his hind paws, and not even dashing aside the two dogs, Poppy and Watch (Harper's dog), who had seized him by the flanks, sprung down the

steep bank into the river, and bear, Roberts, Poppy, and Watch, disappeared simultaneously in the turbid waters of the Petit-Jean.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Assowaum, as clinging with his left hand to a young tree, he looked down over the brink of the shore; "wagh! the white man holds very fast." Before any of the other hunters could reach the spot however, the group which had, for a moment, disappeared beneath the surface, rose again, and Roberts, who was in no wise deprived of his presence of mind, by his somewhat unexpected plunge, now grasped the dead bear, with the two dogs, which had not loosed their hold, even beneath the water, and drew it to the shore. He had now time to look up to the spot from which he had so suddenly and involuntarily descended. Here he encountered the glance of old Harper, who gazed down upon him, and cried:

"Hallo, Roberts! what the deuce are you doing down there with the beast? How shall we ever get it up again?"

"If I was only up myself," said Roberts, laughing: "going down was remarkably easy; to get back may be more difficult."

"Wait!" said Assowaum; "I will manage it."

"Wait!" cried Roberts, with comic ruefulness; "I should like to know what else I can do? When a man is caught as fast in a trap as I am here, you may well say wait."

"Is the bear fat?" asked Harper.

"Tolerably so," replied Roberts, feeling the sides of the beast, which lay near him, half covered with water; "wouldn't you like to judge for yourself?"

"Thank you," said the other, laughing, "I will take your word for it; and besides, I am in no such wonderful hurry to know."

Assowaum had, in the meanwhile, felled a young hickory-tree, which he cut off below the branches; he then removed the most of these from the stem, leaving some, however, standing at such a distance apart as to form a kind of ladder. He then climbed a white oak that grew close to a cypress, and cut from the latter a thin grape-vine at as great a height as he could reach. He first lowered the slender stem to Roberts, and then reached him the end of the vine, directing him to tie the dogs to it one after the other. With the help of his belt and pocket-handkerchief, the old man easily did this, and by the united strength of the men, the animals were soon drawn to the top of the bank.

"But how shall we get the bear up?" asked Harper. "The fellow weighs at least three hundred pounds, and unless we have ropes, we shall be obliged to leave him lying there."

"Wagh!" exclaimed Assowaum, "that will do. Do you see those two pieces of dry wood on the bank? Onesheshin—we will roll them into the water—tie the bear tight upon them, and Assowaum will go with him down the river. Mr. Barker lives a mile and a half below. The others take their horses, and ride down along the cane-brake; by sundown we shall all sit at Mr. Barker's fire."

"A capital idea, Assowaum!" cried Roberts, who now ascended the slender ladder with great agility, and was soon standing beside the rest; "a capital idea! Besides, Barker has cut a road from his house down to the river, and we can there get our boat to land with great convenience."

"But listen, Assowaum!" cried Curtis, as the Indian set about the execution of his plan with wonderful dexterity; "you know the spot, a little above Barker's, where we felled the cypress-tree last summer, that was so full of honey; well, tie your ratt there for a while, and go to the house; Barker is always boasting so dreadfully of the quantity of game he kills, and we'll see for once what sort of provisions he has on hand; so look out that he doesn't spy you with your freight."

The Indian smiled and nodded, but did not reply, and he was soon engaged in rolling the two logs into the river, and tying the bear upon them with strips of hickory bark. In less than a quarter of an hour he had every thing arranged; he then laid his rifle across the bear, and partly wading, partly swimming, pushed the singular vessel before him down the stream.

"An Indian like that is of some use in the woods," said Harper, at last, as the red-skin disappeared around a bend of the stream; "the fellow has very practical ideas, and when he has once contrived a thing in his head, he sets right to work about it. But, halloo! there

comes Goodwin; the deuce take me if I hadn't entirely forgotten him."

"Well, tell me what in the name of all the world are you about?" cried the peddler, as he made his way out of the bushes; "where is the bear?"

"A-sowaum is floating with him down the stream to Barker's," answered Roberts, "and we must now go to our horses, and ride down along the cane-brake, till we come to the narrow path that leads to the old hunter's house. We shall reach it best in this way, for it lies so bid in the thicket, that otherwise we can only find it by accident, or to-morrow morning when we hear the cocks crow."

"And of what use then is my bear hunt," cried Godwin, "if I do not even see the bear?"

"You shall see him, man!" said Harper, "and taste him too; but now, forward! The sun isn't more than an hour high, and I should like to get out of this thicket before it grows dark. Halloo there, dogs! up with you—you shall have a good supper this evening—that's right, Watch! that's well, Poppy! go on before, and set the rest a good example."

Roused by Harper's voice, the dogs, which had sunk exhausted upon the ground, now started up, and followed the hunters, who, taking advantage of an open spot, proceeded several hundred paces down the river, and were then about to cross, obliquely, toward the hills, when the peddler stopped suddenly, and grasped Roberts by the arm.

"Hist! do you see nothing yonder there?" he said, with a rapid but repressed utterance.

"What? where?" asked Roberts.

"There in the bushes—that red thing."

"Ah, true—a deer—he has just risen. Shoot before the dogs get scent of him, or it will be too late."

The peddler quickly brought his rifle to his cheek, took aim for a moment, and fired; the deer sprang aloft at the report, and bounded deeper into the thicket.

"I've hit him! I've hit him!" shouted the peddler, who had run with all speed to the spot where he supposed the deer had stood; "look here! there's blood, and Poppy, the good dog scents it already—see him snuff the blood."

And, in truth, the dogs demeaned themselves very strangely, for while Juno and some of the rest pursued the flying deer, and Watch snuffed eagerly and carefully around in the bushes, without heeding the inviting baying of the other dogs, Poppy seated himself upon the ground, raised his nose in the air, and uttered long and lamentable howls.

"What the deuce is the matter with the beast?" cried Roberts, in astonishment, as he approached the spot. "Can Poppy be howling because you missed the deer?"

"Missed?" said the peddler in great indignation; "look here! does that look like missing? and here! and here! and yonder! do you call that missing?"

"True, there's blood enough," said Curtis, in a tone of wonder, "but I thought the deer ran yonder, where the dogs followed! I thought I saw his white tail shining between the bushes."

"Yes, indeed," said Harper, "he passed between the two cypresses."

"Well, then, this isn't the deer's blood," cried Curtis, "this leads to the river."

"It isn't possible—was it here you killed the bear?" asked the peddler.

"Oh, no, quite a ways above."

"Can't you see tracks?"

"No—but yes—the hunter has passed here; that is a man's foot," cried Curtis, stooping to the ground, "and there's another—there must have been two of them."

"But what can this mean?" muttered Roberts; "the ground here is soft enough, and I can't see a single track in the blood."

"I believe you," said Harper, laughing, "they were not pursuing game, but carrying it, after they had shot it—can't you see how deep their heels are pressed in the ground? They have taken it to the river, and I shouldn't wonder if it had been Barker, and if we should find a nice bit of venison in his house this evening."

"Barker never wears anything but moccasins," said Curtis, shaking his head, "and the one here had on shoes, and the other a pair of boots, such as Brown bought lately at Little Rock. But still it may be they have carried their game to Barker's."

"Well, come, men, leave the tracks alone," cried Roberts, "the sun will soon set, and we must see that we get out of this countounded

cane-brake. If they have carried the game to Barker's, and if the old man was of the party, we shall find it there this evening, and we shall have to listen to a tough story, I tell you; so then, forward!"

"But only look at the dog; how strangely he acts!" said Harper. "For shame, Poppy! why, such howling is enough to set one crazy."

Poppy, indeed, seemed to pay no attention to his master, but snuffed at the spots of blood, from time to time, and then began to howl again so pitifully, that the dogs which had now returned from their useless chase, gathered around him, and lifting their noses in the air, joined in the discordant strain.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Roberts, stopping suddenly, and looking sharply at his dog, "all is not right here—Poppy is too sensible a dog to make such a noise for nothing—there's something wrong about this blood—it is *human* blood!"

"Good heavens!" said Curtis, looking anxiously up in his companion's face.

"Let us follow the tracks to the river," rejoined Roberts, "there we may find an explanation of the matter, or, at least, we can mark the spot, so that we can resume our search in the morning. Here run the tracks, plain enough—all the small bushes are trodden down—the body must have been heavy—if it had been game they would have carried it in Indian file; but look, how carefully they have kept on each side of the blood—the fellows didn't like to have it stain their shoes."

"My flesh creeps when I look at the blood!" said the peddler, and he turned, shuddering, away.

"That's because you havn't been long in Arkansas," said Curtis. "When you have lived your ten years in the State, you won't mind such things. I have seen many a dead body since I have been here, helped to bury many a murdered man—you get used to it—only once—once it was rather too much for me!"

"Spare your story for another time," cried Roberts, impatiently. "We have enough that's horrible before our eyes—let the dead rest."

"You must tell me the story," said the peddler, "I like to hear about such things."

"Another time," replied Curtis. "But there is the river; we shall now find, perhaps, what we are in search of."

"Here they have laid down their burden," said Roberts, pointing to a place where a heavy body had evidently rested—"deer or man, from here it must have been thrown into the river."

Curtis kneeled near the spot, bending his face close to the ground, and carefully scrutinizing the slightest impression upon the soft earth. Suddenly he leaped up in terror, and exclaimed:

"It was a man—there is the print of a button in the soft earth; you can see it plainly—there, near the black streak of blood, in front of the yellow leaf there."

"Tis true," said Roberts, after he had examined the spot, "it was a man—here his hand has rested—and there is the mark of a finger-nail. Gentlemen, a murder has been committed here; there can be no doubt of it, and we must return to this spot to-morrow to investigate the matter; it's too late to-day—if we stay ten minutes longer in this cane-brake, we shall be obliged to camp here all night, for it will be impossible to make our way out of it in the dark; but we'll see to-morrow if we can't discover the victim and the murderer. Now, let's go, my blood runs cold here!"

The men needed no further admonition to leave the place. In silence they cut a path through the cane with their broad hunting-knives, and it was already twilight when they reached their horses, which they found scarcely a hundred paces from the spot where they had left them. They leaped into the saddle, and rode at a round trot through the somewhat open forest, which lay between the cane-brake and the thickly-wooded blights, and before it was completely dark, they arrived at the ford of the Petit-Jean, on the opposite shore of which stood the little cabin occupied by old Barker, who was known in the neighborhood, by the somewhat discreditable appellation of "Lying Barker."

CHAPTER VII.

THE old man was standing before the door, apparently waiting for the hunters, and gazing toward the spot, where he knew they

would emerge from the wood. Assowaum was stooping near him, occupied in drawing on his moccasins, which he had laid aside, during his voyage down the stream, and tied fast to his rifle.

"Holla, across there!" cried Roberts, "is the ford shallow enough?"

"Ay, ay!" was the answer, "only knee deep."

Satisfied with this assurance, the men now spurred their horses directly down the bank, and into the river. Curtis, however, who rode foremost nearly suffered seriously from Barker's jest, for he at once sunk in the stream, which was here so deep that he was obliged to swim his horse to the opposite bank.

"Cousin your old carcass," he cried, angrily, as soon as he had reached firm ground; "why the d—l do you send us into the water in this way, with your infernal lies—ha! is that knee deep?"

"To be sure," said Barker, laughing. "Don't you see that cypress-tree, yonder, in the middle of the stream? It's out of water."

On seeing Curtis sink over head and ears in the river, Roberts had at once checked his horse, and the former now called to him from the opposite bank:

"Ride a bit down the stream, Roberts, where you find the bottom gravelly; there you can cross dry."

"Since you know the way so well," said Barker, laughing, "why didn't you ride further down yourself?"

"Because I was fool enough to believe you, for once," replied the latter. With these words he spurred his horse up the steep bank, leaped from the saddle, and shook the old man by the hand, who gave him a hearty welcome.

Barker was a genuine pioneer, or western squatter. About five years before he had settled in Poinsett county, amid the most frightful marshes, where there was not a single human dwelling for twenty miles around. He had lived contented there, for a while, obtaining a subsistence by hunting; something now occurred, however, to which he was always unwilling to refer, and which he called "family affairs," that compelled him to leave that part of the country. The people on the La Fave whispered something about an over fondness for horse-flesh, but this was totally false; in the first place they were unacquainted with that part of the country, for in that remote district, every animal that strayed as far as his bur, had become wild, and was a fair prey for the hunter; secondly, Barker had always acted like an honest man, and not one of his neighbors could find anything to cavil at in his conduct. That he often "mangled the truth a little," as Roberts expressed it, was a fact confirmed by most of his acquaintances, but he steadfastly repelled this accusation, and was always ready to confirm each of his stories by oath; he would refuse to bet upon them, however, although he was otherwise never backward in taking up a wager. His principal occupation was the breeding of black cattle, and he tilled but a small spot of land, about five acres, in order to provide corn for himself and his family; he owned but few horses, for, in his opinion, the air of Arkansas was prejudicial to the beasts. His family consisted of a wife, two daughters, and one son, the latter of whom did not live with his parents, but had wandered forth two years before, and as he could neither read nor write, he had naturally sent them no news of his whereabouts.

The house itself was a common log cabin, built of rude unhewn trunks of trees; the roof formed of short, coarsely-split boards, was held in its place by heavy staves, called weight-poles. A thin, blue smoke was issuing from the chimney, which was built of clay and beams, and when Roberts called to him, Barker was employed in splitting wood for the evening, in order to keep up a cheerful fire upon the hearth. A small, low fence alone served to prevent a litter of young pigs from invading the peaceful solitude of his abode, and these were now running, squeaking and grunting around this hinderance, as if impatient for their accustomed supper, a few ears of Indian corn. In a small inclosure, near at hand, Barker's older daughter, a pretty black-eyed girl, was milking a large white cow, while the younger held the calf by a rope, that it might not disturb her sister in her task, but wait in due order for its turn. Near the house, upon the tall trunks, which stood in the half-cleared field, were perched a great number of buzzards,

as if they had been scared from their prey, or had left it, to resume their loathsome meal on the following morning.

The three other hunters now rode up to the house, and Roberts called to the old man, while yet at a distance:

"I have done you injustice; we expected to find you without meat, but the buzzards yonder tell us that something must be at hand, though, perhaps, you have been killing a cow?"

"Good-evening, boys! good-evening! you have done well to pay me a visit; killing a cow! no meat in my house, Roberts! You are but little acquainted with old Barker. When I lived on Cache river, I could daily, that is to say, on the average, kill between eight and nine hundred pounds of meat—Curtis knows it—ha, Curtis?"

"Certainly," said the latter, laughing, "tame."

"Tame? Wild animals, buffaloes, black cattle, that were running wild, reckoned in, of course; but dismount, dismount! make yourselves at home. Betsy, throw an armful of corn in the trough for the horses—do you hear? and stand by them until they have done eating, to keep off the pigs, or the beasts will overturn the trough again, as they did yesterday."

"Barker, there must be carrion in the neighborhood," cried Roberts, after the first salutations were past; "by my soul something here smells like rotten flesh."

"Rotten flesh! God bless you," said Barker, with a laugh, "you have good noses; there is nothing hereabouts—the rascally buzzards always come when a man kills—"

"Kills!" cried Curtis, in dismay; "does what you kill smell so? What is the matter, Assowaum? the fellow looks as if he were trying to laugh."

"Master Barker has killed a little pig," said the Indian, who was evidently highly delighted at the jest; "but the buzzards are stupid birds; the pig was killed the day before yesterday, and here they come to-day."

"And are we to eat that?" said Roberts, laughing; "why, where are the deer?"

"What deer?"

"Why, those you shoot every day, as you told us lately."

"Ah, I have wrenched my foot, and I haven't been able to hunt for these three days."

"Barker—here is a friend of mine, Mr. Harper—one of my neighbors, who would be glad to make your acquaintance—Harp'r—Mr. Barker, the man I have told you so much about—think you will be friends." The two men shook each other by the hand, and Barker swore he "would be d—d, if Harper hadn't an uncommon good natured face."

"But Barker," said Curtis, interrupting him, "at break of day, to-morrow morning, we must go up to the little sluie, where the three dry cypresses stand; a murder has been committed there; at least, it looks very much like it."

"A murder! you don't say so!"

"It can't be otherwise; we found the traces too plain, but we had no time to examine the matter very closely. Besides, it isn't far from here, and to-morrow morning we can easily find out whether we are right or not; it would be impossible to pursue the murderers to-day."

"Thunder! that's singular!" cried Barker; "I passed the spot only this morning, and remarked nothing."

"I thought you had wrenched your foot," said Curtis.

"Well, yes—three days ago—blockhead, do you think that I must limp all my life from it? Curtis, you're getting really stupid! but, come in, boys; the dew falls uncommon moist this evening, and it's comfortable sitting by the chimney."

"Well, old fellow," said Roberts, slapping him upon the shoulder, "if you are so poorly off for provisions, we'll send for our stock; Assowaum, bring along the bear; we must let the cat out of the bag at once, I see, or go hungry."

The Indian left them, and to Barker's joy and astonishment, soon returned, floating down the stream with his raft and bear. By the combined exertions of the men, the animal was dragged from the water to the front of the house, and in a short time some of the choicest pieces were placed in the hands of the women for cooking.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Barker!" said Roberts, entering the house, and greeting the good woman; "how goes it? it's a long time since I have seen you—still hearty and lively."

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Roberts," replied the woman, in a friendly tone, as she pushed from her face the large cotton bonnet that she wore when cooking, in order to protect her eyes from the heat, and wiped the sweat from her forehead with her apron; "I'm glad to see you. I shall soon come over and pay you a visit, but there's no getting my old man out of the house."

"My wife and Marion have been looking for you this long while," replied Roberts, shaking the hand which she held out to him, "and how goes it with the girls here in the bush—eh? but they are used to the lonely life, for it wasn't much livelier in the swamps of the Cache river. Frightful land those Cache river swamps; when I was last there, and rode by Strong's—Strong, who owns the big farm. How many niggers did he buy last summer?"

"Stop him! for Heaven's sake, stop him!" cried Barker, shouting; "there he goes again, full gallop; if we don't stop him, in five minutes he will be at the revolutionary war. The Lord be gracious to us, Roberts, there's no speaking a reasonable word with you. But you deserve to be rewarded, my lads, for your excellent supply of provisions; here, Lucy, reach me the jug from the cupboard; take care, you buzzz, if you break it, look out! Now boys, we'll make an evening of it—bear's meat and whisky!" and the old man shouted his hunting-cry, so that the hounds without grew restless, and began to howl.

"Barker, the beasts are eating each other," said Cook, at last; "they are hungry enough, I am sure; where is your hog's flesh, then? We will give to the dogs what isn't wholesome for men."

"My good pork."

"Go to the d—l with your pork! I thought you could shoot so many deer."

"Yes, but my foot!"

"There's his foot again! the fellow! but why do you sit so silent there, Harper, without uttering a syllable; you are thinking of the murder, I suppose."

"Yes! to tell the truth, I can't get the spots of blood out of my mind; it was too frightful!"

"Frightful, Mr. Harper? You should have lived on Cache river last year," replied Barker. "Harg me if two or three dead bodies didn't come floating by every day."

"Where did they all come from?" inquired Harper, half startled, half-incredulous. "I thought that that region wasn't overstocked with men."

"Men! I didn't trouble my head about that. That didn't concern me."

"Stay! save your conversation till after supper," said Roberts, laughing; "but first of all, let us see to the horses, and then we can eat in quiet."

This advice was at once followed; they were returning from this task as Mrs. Barker stepped to the door to call them to supper, and in a few moments, pushing forward upturned barrels, chests, and rudely-made stools, the men were seated about the narrow table, in the middle of which stood a huge dish, full of roasted bear's ribs, and bear's flesh, cut in thin slices, while corn-bread, stewed pumpkin, honey and milk, formed the remainder of the repast. In the meanwhile, the whisky bottle was passed around, and though not a word more was spoken, yet the clatter of knives and forks, and the smoothly gnawed ribs, that were gradually piled up on all sides, proved the relish with which the hungry hunters dispatched the meal.

When they had ended, they rose from the table, singly, as they had finished, and the women, who had been careful to lay aside a few dainty pieces, took the vacant places, without thinking it worth the trouble to substitute clean plates for the greasy ones; soon everything that could remind an observer of roasted bear's flesh had disappeared from the table.

Mrs. Barker, a woman of about forty years of age, still displayed the traces of considerable beauty, but her slender form was clad in a cotton gown, which had once been white, and which was by no means as clean as it might have been; her handsome brown hair was fastened with the utmost negligence about her head, and her dark eyes, though large and lustrous, seemed out of place, in her somewhat coarse and dirty-looking face. Her daughters were clothed in better and neater garments, yet even their complexions would have been improved by a little soap and warm water.

When the victuals or rather the dishes had been removed—for, as we have said, the vict-

uals had disappeared, without leaving a trace behind—Barker pushed the table back a little, that the various seats might be ranged in a half circle around the chimney, and then exclaimed, joyfully:

"Now, gentlemen, comes the best—the stew."

"But you have no butter," said his wife.

"Thunder! true enough but, never mind, what do we want of butter? we have got bear's grease—whisky with bear's grease will go much better. Gentlemen, this is the land to live in—there is nothing like Arkansas!"

"Well, well, Mr. Barker," said Harper, whose reserve began to thaw, as he watched these preparations for his favorite beverage; "well, well, I don't know—Missouri is not to be despised; I have lived there a good many years, and—"

"Missouri!" cried Barker, in astonishment. "Missouri! God help us! and you compare that country with Arkansas?"

"Why, it borders close enough upon it."

"Borders! It is just as if the Almighty had taken his finger and drawn a line between the two States, that the one should be fruitful and the other unfruitful. Missouri! why, everything stops there. How long have you really lived in Arkansas?"

"About six weeks."

"Ah, that alters the case! then you can't know any better; why, the land is so rich here, sir, that when we want to make candles, all we have to do is to dip the wicks in the mud-puddles—they burn as good as wax. When a man in Arkansas tills his field with care and attention, he can count upon its yielding a hundred bushels to the acre."

"That's a great crop."

"Great! it's nothing at all—when he takes no trouble with his land, and lets the corn grow up as it will, he is sure of seventy-five bushels; and when he don't plant any, why—why, he'll get fifty—you can't kill the land."

Harper moved uneasily upon the chest on which he was seated, while Roberts and Curtis cast stolen glances at each other.

"And what is a great advantage besides," continued Barker, "he need never plant till July, the corn grows so wonderfully fast. Only think, last year it took the beans I had planted between the hills clean out of the ground by the roots; and the pumpkins—four men couldn't reach around one of them."

"Astonishing country!" said Harper; "but I suppose then, that everything must be on a large scale here?"

"Everything on a large scale!" said Barker, now completely astride his hobby-horse, which was boasting of the land in which he lived; "everything on a large scale! I should think so; in the hot summer days the mosquitoes fly so thick that they often stick together with sweat, and fall to the ground in lumps; I have watched the wood ticks with my own eyes, and seen them rise up on their fore-legs out of a piece of wood, and listen to the cowbells, and the fleas go regularly every evening to drink in the river, like other cattle. And then, what rivers we have—the Lord be good to us—they push the sea away, miles and miles from the land when they run into it."

"But they don't run into it!" hinted Harper.

"Don't run into it! What becomes of them then?" cried Barker, indignantly. "Do they sweat away, eh? What does the Petit-Jean run into?"

"Into the Arkansas."

"Well, and the Arkansas?"

"Into the Mississippi."

"And the Mississippi?"

"Into the gulf of Mexico."

"As if that wasn't all one and the same thing. Well, now take the southern part of Missouri—have any of you ever been in the southern part of Missouri?"

"All of us, probably," replied Roberts.

"As far as Eleven Point river? Gentlemen, I don't wish to exaggerate, but it is so rocky there that a man is obliged to lift the sheep, one by one, by the hind legs, that they may get at the little grass that grows between the sharp stones, and the wolves are so thin and weak that when they want to howl they have to lean against a tree. You see now the difference between Missouri and Arkansas. What did we do, for example, in winter, when we had nothing for the poor cattle to eat. Well, guess."

"Let them run wild in the wood," replied Curtis.

"What use would that have been, I should like to know? The ground was so dry that even the bark wouldn't grow on the trees and bushes. No, I hit upon a very different plan. You know Tom Roberts—the fellow who afterward had to take a hasty trip to Texas—tall Tom—you must remember him—he was so tall that he had to kneel down when he wanted to scratch his head. Well, he had formerly been a mechanic, I believe, in Philadelphia, and had brought a whole lot of tools and things with him; I got him to make me a number of large green spectacles; I put them on the cow, and gave 'em shavings to eat, and I hope I may be shot, if they didn't take them for grass and grow fat."

"Heaven help us!" cried Harper.

"Here we have it better," continued Barker, in delight; "here we sit, as it were, in clover, and as for the hunting—"

"Holla!" cried Harper, interrupting him; "nothing can eat Missouri in that—the hunting can't be better here."

"Better?" rejoined Barker, laughing scornfully; "better! Why, when a bear here has only three inches of fat upon his back, we call him lean—the deer—"

"We catch them by the legs," cried Roberts. Barker glanced at him in astonishment, while Harper's face wore an expression of great self-complacency.

"Well, Robert, you must own it yourself," continued Barker; "but, Betsy, the water's boiling; now brew the drink, my girl; you know how we like it—you must own it yourself, Roberts, that no one here comes up to me in hunting; I don't shoot small game any more, I have my own way of taking them."

"Like the boys with us," said Harper, "they catch rabbits in traps."

"Traps!" cried Barker, scornfully; "there's no need of traps for that. Come to Arkansas when you want to learn anything. When a trifle of snow covers the ground, I go a bit into the woods, just out of sight of the house."

"Toot isn't very far," hinted Curtis.

"Well, there I stick little pieces of red beets in the snow, and sprinkle them over with snuff; the next morning I find the rabbits lying dead near them."

"Do they eat the snuff?" asked the peddler, in astonishment.

"Eat it! No, they smell of it, and then sneeze so hard that they break their necks."

"Talking of breaking necks," said Harper, "puts me in mind how I served an owl lately. The rascal had carried off a chicken from me, three nights in succession, and I could never get a shot at the fellow. At last, on the fourth day—it was raining a little—the owl came flying to the house early in the morning; I knew it by the fluttering and cackling of the hens. I caught up my rifle, ran out, and soon found the bird, sitting upon a small, bushy hickory tree. I could only see its head, and, as I didn't want to kill it outright, but only to make a little sport for the dogs, I walked around the tree in a circle, looking for a convenient place to shoot. But the leaves were as thick on one side as on the other, and the owl kept staring at me with its large, rolling, fiery eyes. I had gone three times around the tree, with my rifle to my shoulder, when all at once I heard a rustling in the branches, and down fell the owl. In following me around with its eyes, it had twisted its own neck off."

"That's no trick," said Barker, to whom it did not once occur to doubt the truth of this narrative. "When I was a boy, I could beat a wild turkey running; and when they flew, I was sure of them, if they didn't rise too high."

"As for running," said Harper, "I wish you could have seen my brother when he was after partridges."

"You won't pretend to tell us that he caught partridges on the wing?" cried Barker, starting from his seat in dismay.

"No," replied Harper, "not quite, but I'm blest if, at every jump, he didn't pull a handful of feathers out of their tails."

"Gentlemen, here comes the stew," cried Roberts. "God bless you, Betsy! you have made it strong—no, I thank you, no more water, it spoils the flavor; it ought to be brewed with it. But, Barker, you were right—the bear's grease is capital; it has a sort of wild, fiery taste."

The conversation was interrupted for a moment, and the men resigned themselves entirely to the enjoyment of the drink. At last, Curtis broke the solemn silence, and said, smacking his lips:

"Roberts, your wife and Mr. Rawson ought to see you sitting here, drinking whisky stew! they would make fine faces."

Roberts, who was already at his third glass, and was beginning to grow warm, took the mug from his lips, and cried:

"Mr. Rawson may go to grass! I know this—he will preach none of his doctrines into me. With my wife and daughter he may manage it as he pleases, or as they please, rather."

"What pleases him, pleases them, I think," said Curtis.

"The smooth, sneaking hypocrite has always been a thorn in my eye. He's forever abusing the Roman Catholics. Confound me if I think he's a pinch of snuff better himself!"

"Rawson is desperately in love with your daughter, I suppose?" said Curtis.

"Why, of course. In four weeks they are to be married."

"Listen, Roberts! I was once most monstrously in love," said Barker, simpering. "I was with a girl from the city—St. Louis. I was then trading with the Osages up toward the Missouri and the Yellowstone river, and I camped about three miles to the westward of the place. Would you believe it? every three days I received a large letter brimful of love and passion, I suppose; it was a pity only that I couldn't read them; and the Indians that I lived with didn't know the difference between the inside of a letter and the out. But they must have been piping hot, for I tied 'em together, and put them, as I went out, into a leather purse, and when I came home, and opened it again, I found nothing but ashes."

"But, good people, I should think it was time to go to bed," said the peddler, yawning; "we must start by daybreak to-morrow morning, and I almost feel as if I was tired."

"Yes, it is getting rather late," replied Roberts, who had gone to the door to look at the stars; "it must be past ten."

"One moment!" cried Harper, with rather a heavy tongue. "Talking of love, puts me in mind of a story about my brother, when he was quite a lad. You ought to have known him—a d—l of a fellow—but eighteen years old, and had promised marriage to three different girls. He paid a visit once to a Quaker in Philadelphia, and, singular enough, it happened to be the brother of one of the girls. The fellow recognized him, but was mighty civil, and invited him to stay and eat dinner; after dinner he got up, pretending to have business, and left the house to fetch a constable, and have my brother arrested. But what do you think he found when he returned home?"

"Well, I suppose your brother had cleared cut."

"Yes, but not alone: he had gone off with the Quaker's wife!"

"Well, the man can lie," said Barker, in a whisper, to Curtis, who stood near him.

"Now to bed," said Roberts. "Where are we to sleep, Barker?"

"True, we must settle that. There are only three beds: the girls must keep one; one is for me and my wife; and the third must be for the oldest—for Roberts and Mr. Harper. The other three gentlemen, Curtis, Mr. Godwin, and Assowaum, will find skins enough to sleep comfortably upon. That's right, Betsy! spread them down nicely; and to-morrow we will be off at daybreak."

Assowaum, who had not uttered a syllable during the whole evening, but who had appeared greatly amused at the narratives of the two men, and had been by no means sparing of the whisky, now wrapped his blanket around him. But as he stepped to the place where he intended to lie down, in passing the chimney close to the fire, he stumbled and almost fell.

"Hallo, Indian!" cried Harper, laughing, "have you got too much whisky in your head? That is not good."

"It is not good to take too much of anything," replied the "Feathered Arrow," as he stretched himself at his length, and pushed under his head a log of wood that stood near at hand, "but too much whisky is just enough." With this truly philosophical remark, he turned upon his side, and in a few moments was sound asleep.

"Have you a preference for any particular side of the bed, Roberts?" inquired Harper, when he had laid aside his clothes.

"No," replied the latter, in unsuspecting simplicity.

"Well then, take the under side," said Harper, with a laugh, as he crept upon the

dressed deerskin that was spread over their couch.

Roberts did not seem to be satisfied with this arrangement, for he soon lay at Harper's side; and, in a short time, nothing but the low crackling of the fire, with the deep and regular breathing of the slumberers, was heard in the apartment.

CHAPTER VIII.

UPON the thick-leaved peach-trees which grew around the log-but, the cocks were announcing the coming morning; the wild turkeys in the wood without answered them, and in the east the friendly stars began to grow pale.

The three females whom we have described in the preceding chapter, Mrs. Barker and her two daughters, now rose from their beds, in order to dress before daylight in the narrow chamber which they were obliged to share with so many strangers. They stepped carefully over the sleepers, who lay stretched around the fire, and blew the glimmering coals to a livelier glow. Soon, fed by pine-chips, a cheerful blaze gleamed upon the hearth, the large tin coffee-pot was set upon the coals, and a flat piece of dough placed aslant, leaning upon an iron cover, before the fire.

"I have told your father fifty times," grumbled Mrs. Barker, as she poured the roasted coffee into a tin basin, and, placing it before her upon the hearth, began to bruise the grains with the handle of a hatchet, "that he should bring me a coffee-mill from Morrison's Bluff or Little Rock; but no—Heaven help us! he never forgets his hunting-tools, but when it's anything for me, I may tell him I don't know how many times, it's of no use. He was over at the store yesterday again; he didn't forget the whisky-jug, oh no—but the coffee-mill!"

"Don't grumble, old woman!" cried Barker from his bed, "don't grumble!"

"Well, it's true."

"No, it is not true. Feel yonder in the corner, where the rifle stands—further to the right—so—how do you call that thing?"

"Why, goodness me, it's a coffee-mill! and you let me pound away here."

"When my eyes are shut, how can I see what you are doing?"

"Well, Roberts," said Harper, sitting up in bed, "it's no easy matter to sleep with you. You are by no means bashful."

"Why, I hope you'll allow me half of the bed," muttered Roberts, still partly asleep.

"Certainly," replied Harper, "but not the middle half, so that I must lie on both sides to get my share; that is against all rule."

"Come, boys, get up, get up!" cried old Barker, who had stepped to the chimney, and was now holding aloft the whisky-jug; "here is a stomach-strengthener—who wants his bitters?"

These words produced their effect. All leaped to their feet; the Yankee peddler alone still lay outstretched upon the floor, sleeping as soundly as if death-like stillness prevailed in the house. Curtis worked long at his ribs, but in vain, and declared at last, with an oath, that the fellow was so tall, he should have to wake him piecemeal. As the sun cast its first beams through the glowing tree-tops, the men took their seats around the breakfast-table, while the girls fed the horses without, and kept the pigs and hens from the trough.

"But tell me, Barker," inquired Roberts during the meal, "what becomes now of our hog-hunt? If we mean to trace out this murderer, we must let the pigs run, and my wife will grumble finely."

"Well, but you can come over another time. Besides, I believe that most all of us—those, of course, excepted who are eaten by the bears—will meet about two miles further down the river. Day before yesterday I saw a great lot with your mark; and, by-the-by, the sow that belongs to your father, Curtis, the one that had the piece of flesh taken out of the back of her neck by a bear."

"What! is she alive yet?"

"Yes, and is running round with a litter of eleven nice pigs."

"You don't say so!" cried Curtis. "Listen, Barker! keep a close mouth about it; I was talking the other day with the old man about the sow, and he thinks she's dead. I'll buy her of him, found or not found. He'll let me have her for a dollar, and then I'll drive her home."

"Not so bad," exclaimed Harper, laughing; "he wants to cheat his own father!"

"It isn't cheating," said the peddler, smiling

with Curtis. "A man who can earn a dollar in an honest way doesn't cheat anybody; his father isn't obliged to sell him the sow."

"That's the last thing a Yankee would find fault with," said Barker, who had listened quietly to their conversation. "But now away, boys!—the sun is up, and we must lose no more time. If a murder has been committed, we may perhaps be able to overtake the murderers, although it seems to me very unlikely, for, in the first place, I rode by the spot yesterday morning, and then Mr. Brown must have taken the same direction."

"Brown?" inquired Harper, quickly, "Brown? How did he come in this quarter? He was going across to Morrison's bluff."

"He said so; but if he came straight from the La Fave, it was rather a roundabout road. But, come—come!—we may perhaps get home by noon."

The hunters now took leave of the women, crossed at the lower ford, Assowaum mounting behind Harper, and on they rode at a brisk trot toward the place where they had yesterday found the suspicious signs.

"Hold! here is the spot," cried the Indian, leaping from the horse; "we must ride no further, or we shall trample the ground too much."

The horsemen dismounted quickly, and fastened their horses to the pendent vines. Assowaum walked on in front, and stopped at the first trace that was imprinted in the soft soil. He stooped cautiously, and examined with great minuteness every blade of grass, every leaf that lay upturned upon the ground; then rose again, and advanced with light steps along the tracks, until he reached the place where the blood was first visible. But scarcely had he glanced around, when he uttered a deep, loud "Wagh!" which quickly drew the hunters about him. He pointed to the ground, and the deed of horror at once became manifest to all.

The spot to which his finger was directed lay precisely at the foot of a fallen pine, where, in the hollow once occupied by its roots, a thick network of blackberry vines and prickly, creeping plants, had grown up; it appeared that a horse had been in the act of passing this little thicket; the hoof-prints led half around it, but here the rider must have been stopped by something, probably the bullet of the assassin. Here was the first blood; but the unhappy man had not yet fallen from the saddle: the tracks showed that his horse had taken a leap.

"The ball must have hit the horse," said Roberts; "if it had struck the rider he would have fallen—"

Assowaum pointed in silence to a branch of a hickory-tree which stood not far off, upon the bright gray bark of which, about eight or nine feet from the ground traces of blood were distinctly visible.

"By my soul!" cried Harper, in terror, "he has struck his head against the hickory—and here is the place where he fell."

Here the ground was marked by many footsteps. The murdered man had evidently resisted, and a few single branches showed where he had clung to them with the last strength of despair, for they were completely stripped of their leaves. Here he had fallen upon one knee, and had never risen again, for dark thick blood covered the ground at this spot. But yes, once more—there, where the red life-stream dyed all the bushes, and had spouted as from an open vein, against the trunk of yonder pine—there the spark of life must have gleamed up for the last time. Beneath this cypress he must have expired, for here the body had evidently lain for a while, and no living man could have endured this position, with his back bent across the sharp roots.

The men gazed shuddering and in silence at these terrible proofs of the murder; for murder it was, no combat had taken place, at most an obstinate defense; the dead man had been shot, or dragged from his horse and slain.

"Come," said Assowaum, as he followed the tracks down toward the bank of the river, carefully scrutinizing every foot-print as he advanced, "two men have carried him—"

"We remarked this yesterday; the tracks lead to the stream," cried Curtis.

"Here they have laid him down," said the Indian; "and here, two have stood—what is that? A knife—and bloody."

"A pen-knife by the living—!" exclaimed Roberts; "but they couldn't have killed a man with that."

"Show me the knife," said Harper, extending his hand to take it, "perhaps I may recognize it."

Harper bent forward, and both carefully examined it; at last he shook his head, adding:

"I have never seen the thing—it is new."

Roberts did not recognize it, nor did any of the others.

"I will take it with me," said Roberts, at last, "perhaps it will lead to something; I must wash the blood off, however; it looks too frightful."

"A-tia!" cried Assowaum, at this moment, and he pointed to a spot in the bushes, not far from the place where the body had lain; "what is that?"

"They have buried the body there," cried the peddler.

"No, no," said Curtis, who now stepped to the place, "the hole is hardly large enough to bury an opossum in, much less a man. But some one has been digging here, and with a broad knife, and the earth that was removed is no longer here; what can they have done with that?"

Assowaum closely examined the ground, between the spot where the body had lain and the little pit, and then rose, saying:

"The body of a drowned man often floats, and is caught by some bush or tree—when the body is filled with earth, it sinks."

"Frightful! frightful!" exclaimed Roberts; "it was for this they used the little knife—to slit open the body! Gentlemen, this is a fearful deed! who can the unhappy man be?"

"The stream conceals that secret," replied Harper, gloomily, "and who knows whether it will ever come to light, but—what is the Indian about? What are you going to do, Assowaum?"

"Make a rope and dive," said the latter, as he peeled the bark from a small papao-tree that stood near, and tied the strips together.

"Dive! After the body!" said Roberts, with a shudder.

"Jan e—man!" whispered the Indian, pointing to the water; "he is there." With these words he removed his hunting-shirt, leggings, and moccasins, and turned to leap into the water.

"Stop!" said the peddler, who had watched these preparations with great attention, and now understood his purpose; "it will take you too long to tie a rope around the body; here is a fish-book," and he took from his pocket a small package which contained books of every possible description, and reached one of the largest to the Indian.

"Onisheshin!" cried Assowaum, nodding in approval; he then quickly fastened the hook to the tough papao bark, looked once again at the spot from which the body had been cast into the stream, and the next moment disappeared. A deathlike stillness prevailed for several seconds. No one ventured to breathe; the waters had flowed together over the form of the red hunter, for the river was here quite deep, and rapidly ascending bubbles alone, betrayed his presence in the depths below. A mass of black and glossy hair now rose to view, and then the warrior's head appeared above the surface; he drew a long breath, and at once made for the shore, where the men were standing. He clambered up the steep bank, holding the hook still in his hand.

"And the body?" asked Roberts.

"I have felt it," was Assowaum's reply; "my hand touched it as I groped around; but the water lifted me up too soon—it is down there."

"Will one of my brothers fetch me a stone?" he asked, after a while, as he cast himself exhausted beneath a tree; "I am weary—I must rest!"

"Do you mean to dive again?" cried Harper, in astonishment. The Indian nodded merely. Godwin now hastened to a part of the shore that was covered with pebbles, and soon returned with a tolerably heavy stone, which Curtis at once tied to a short rope, at the other extremity of which he made a noose.

"So, Indian," he then said, "if you hang this upon your left wrist it will take you down; and when you want to come up again all you have to do is to slip it off—look! in this way."

The Indian needed but little instruction, however; he at once followed the white man's counsel, but this time he left the end of the rope which he had made in Curtis's hand, taking only the hook in his right; then carefully arranging the string so that it should not

get entangled, he glided down the steep bank, and plunged a second time into the water.

He now remained much longer under water than he did on his former trial, for cumbered by the stone, he could move but slowly along the bottom, and feel after the object of his search with his feet. At last the string that held the book was pulled with some violence; several air-bubbles rose to the surface and again appeared the dark head of the Indian, who swam quickly to the bank, ascended from the water, looking behind him for a moment with an air of terror. His face had assumed the hue of ashes, and as he brushed his long raven hair from his brow, his eyes gleamed with a steadfast and spectral light, as if he were no longer an inhabitant of earth; as if the spirit of his first progenitor were ascending from the gloomy deep, unwilling to share that moist grave with an enemy of his people.

"The hook is fast," cried Curtis, who held one end of the string in his hand; "Assowaum has found the body!"

While the Indian looked out in silence upon the surface of the water, the men upon the bank drew slowly and carefully upon the string, that they might not break it; the body, in whose clothes the hook was fastened, rose gently, and soon a dark object was visible in the water. The stream divided, receding, as if shrinking from the fearful burden, and the next moment Assowaum grasped the body by the shoulder and drew it to land. The men had descended the bank, and as the Indian turned the body, and its pallid face came uppermost, a cry of horror escaped from every lip.

"Heathcote!" exclaimed the hunters, with one voice.

"Heathcote!" sighed forth Harper, faintly.

For several moments the men stood around in silence, gazing with looks of terror upon the fearful spectacle. The body of the unhappy man had been cut open and filled with earth and stones. A wide gash stood gaping on the forehead; a rifle ball, however, seemed to have passed through his body. Roberts bent down and examined the wound caused by the latter.

"What size ball does Brown's gun carry?" he asked, in a low tone, as if he feared to utter the young man's name, so near the corpse.

"Thirty to the pound," replied Harper, in a whisper. Roberts pointed in silence to the wound which the ball had made in the breast of the murdered man.

"Do you think him guilty of the deed?" asked Harper glancing timidly around the circle.

"Guilty! No; by heaven!" cried Curtis, "no jury in all Arkansas would pronounce him guilty. After Heathcote had uttered such threats against him, as Smith told me he did. I feel sorry to see the stout and lusty fellow lying here in this fashion; but, thunder and lightning! when such men who are known to mean something when they threaten, say in plain terms that they intend to shoot a man through the head the next time they meet him, they deserve nothing better than a rifle ball—that's my opinion—only the cutting open of the body, he might as well have left that alone, the buzzards would have dispatched it as well and quicker; look, see how they fly this way in troops. But this time you are mistaken; this is no meat for your maws. We must give information of this, I suppose; shall we let him lie here in the meanwhile?"

"No; by no means!" cried Roberts, "we mustn't do that; it will be best to cover the body with branches, and go and inform the coroner; he will then attend to the matter. I'll have nothing further to do with it; what are you looking for, Godwin?"

The peddler was kneeling near the body, and was carefully examining the leather hunting-shirt, which clung in wet folds to the breast of the murdered man.

"This man, here," he said, at last, in a serious tone, as he rose from his knees, "carried in the leather pocket-book that you see here, four hundred and seventy-five dollars, in bank notes, all as good as silver; I saw them myself in Bowitt's house yesterday, and he couldn't have lost them, for the clasp of the pocket-book doesn't easily yield—it has been opened by some one, and the money has been stolen."

"Who here will dare say that my nephew has robbed a lifeless body?" cried old Harper, while a deathlike pallor suffused his face, and, tearing his knife from its sheath, he started up indignantly; "who calls my Bill a thief?"

"Hold, Harper," said Roberts, in a soothing tone, placing his hand upon his arm, "we have every reason to believe that Brown shot Heathcote, but another may have taken the money—there were two at the business."

"But who could have been with him?"

"God only knows—not we; but here are the tracks of two men; the one wore boots, the other shoes, that's certain, and if Brown did the deed in self-defense, or as a matter of precaution, the other may easily have found an opportunity to secure the money."

"Brown would never have permitted it."

"Perhaps he didn't see it; but that's all one, the bills were here, for Heathcote told me in front of my house, that he had just sold three horses and had the money about him. Brown heard him, it is true, yet I think the young man honest, and as I have said, who knows who it was that helped him?"

"It is terrible!" cried Harper, covering his face with his hands and, disturbed by the most violent emotion, he leaned for support against a tall oak. Assowaum, lost in thought, sat with his legs crossed, his chin in his left hand, his elbow resting upon his knee, at the foot of the same tree.

"So, then, let us to work," said Curtis, as he turned to drag branches to the spot—"my blood runs cold while I am here; I shouldn't like to pass an hour longer near that fearful face."

"Right, Curtis," replied Roberts, assisting him in dragging a somewhat heavy bough to the body; "a few more such branches as this, and then a few twigs over them, and the crows and buzzards will leave it in peace till afternoon; the wolves will not venture here by daylight."

Curtis, Roberts, and Godwin, now cut from the trees, with their stout hunting-knives, a sufficient quantity of branches to form a roof, and the temporary grave of the murdered man was soon completed. Harper and Assowaum, however, looked on, silent and inactive, until this sad duty was performed, and the men prepared to leave the place. Harper followed them as they departed, but with apparent unconsciousness; the old man's strength seemed exhausted. He did not utter a lament, but his pallid cheeks, his steadfast gaze, proclaimed but too clearly the emotion that agitated his bosom. He did not doubt, for a moment, that Brown had committed the murder; this would have been excusable in the eyes of the world, at least, in Arkansas; but the money, the money—it was terrible! There were men enough in the settlement, who were but too ready to think the worst of another, even in a case where this worst was far from being supported by such striking proofs, and here, where even an impartial person must hesitate, it was dreadful! He mounted into the saddle, and threw the reins upon the neck of his horse, which slowly followed the others; he did not even remark that the Indian still lingered, in his attitude of thought, at the foot of the oak.

Assowaum remained thus for several minutes after the others had disappeared in the thicket with his eyes fixed dreamily upon the ground; then, when the last tramp of hoofs, the last baying of dogs, had died away, he rose softly, and again inspected the tracks. With a small knife that he wore at his belt, he marked upon the handle of his tomahawk, the exact length and breadth of the foot-prints; then, after he had convinced himself that nothing had escaped his attention he shouldered his rifle, and plunged, in a direction opposite to that taken by the hunters, into the thickest of the forest.

CHAPTER IX.

WE must now lead the reader back to the thicket which we described at the commencement of this narrative, where, on the same morning that the hunters on the Petit-Jean fished up the body from the river, the four accomplices met together to arrange the further details of their plan. Cotton and Weston were the first to make their appearance upon the ground. Johnson and Rawson, however, did not keep them waiting long, and were welcomed by the two others with a joyous "Hurra!"

"Hist! hist!" said Rawson, silencing them; "don't shout as if you were upon the county road, and didn't care who heard you."

"Well, I don't care," replied Weston, laughing; "what of it, if any one should find us here?"

"It is nothing to you, indeed, but something to me. My mother-in-law, that is to be, is a

very pious woman, and she wouldn't feel so very greatly flattered if she knew that I counted you among my acquaintances."

"Your mother-in-law!" cried Cotton in astonishment. "Is it true, then, what the people say? Are you really going to marry old Roberts's daughter? I have heard of it, but I never believed it."

"And why not, Mr. Cotton? This is the last affair of the kind we shall manage together—I wish to become an honest man."

"It's time, that's a fact!" cried Cotton; "almost a little too late even. But God be gracious to the poor girl!"

"Mr. Cotton, I beg you to spare your remarks. I will have no jesting on this subject."

"Peace! peace!" said Johnson; "you haven't come here to begin your old quarrels; our business is more serious. What luck have you had, Cotton?"

"Four deer and a fox."

"You might as well have let the fox run. And you, Weston?"

"Two deer and two wild turkeys."

"Then I have come off the poorest," said Johnson. "It is true I could plead a good excuse: I fell down a steep bight yesterday morning; that is, a stone gave way under me, and I slid down, and scraped all my arm. That, of course, hindered me in hunting."

"That is all one," cried Weston. "Does it make any difference in a race, when a horse falls lame? No, no; a fair start, and no allowance for accidents."

"Where are your skins, then, eh?" asked Johnson, half-angrily.

"They are hanging near Cotton's hut. If you don't believe us, come and look; but I should think—"

"Well, well, I was only in jest. Rawson and I begin the dance, then. God help us, what a stir it will make in the settlement! but, with four-and-twenty hours' start, all Arkansas sha'n't find the beasts again. Rawson has contrived a capital plan. Don't forget the place, then, above Haswell's canoe; and do you, Weston, keep your horses in the fallen but on Horse creek, and make as few tracks as possible. But you need no teaching."

"Where shall I keep in the meanwhile?" asked Cotton. "I don't quite like to lie idle. I'll go across to Atkins's; there I can rest a little."

"There's plenty of game thereabouts—you won't want for meat," said Johnson.

"And the Regulators?"

"May go to the d—l! Before they scent the trick, it will be too late; and then, with all their cunning, they'll be nonplussed. But it will be uncommon restless here in the county for a long time afterward."

"If my plan succeeds," said Rawson, "the Regulators will find nothing that they can make a handle of against us; they are sure to take the false track, and when one of the hounds has struck upon it, the whole yelping pack will follow. It will be a capital joke to trick that vain braggadocio Heathcote."

"Well, we'll do our best; but when do you set out?"

"At once," answered Johnson; "the sooner the business is dispatched the better. The Regulators are beginning to hold their meetings; and when once the scoundrels have set the whole county in commotion, it will be too late to engage in any sensible operation."

"I must, at all events, stop at Robert's once before we start," said Rawson, "and this morning, indeed; but that will not delay us. Johnson, in the meanwhile, can go through the wood, and we will meet at the source of the Cypress river, where the red-beech tree stands."

"Do we go on foot, then?" asked Johnson.

"Of course," replied Rawson; "that is to say, go, but not come back, on foot."

"I hope not," cried Cotton, laughing. "And now, boys, good-by—I must be off."

"When will you meet me at the place agreed upon?" inquired Weston. "I don't want to be kept waiting there very long with the horses."

"Certainly not before Friday evening," replied Rawson, "and not then, if anything interferes. We can't reach the place on foot before Thursday evening, and if we don't find a good chance then, why, you will have to wait until Saturday; but I hope all will go well, and then we shall be on the spot by sunset, Friday evening. A merry meeting, then!"

"A merry meeting!" cried Cotton and Weston, as they disappeared in the bushes. Raw-

son gazed after them for a while; then shook his head, and said to his companion:

"Johnson, this must be the last time that we engage in anything of this sort with that fellow Cotton. The people on the island will have nothing to do with him; they have heard that he gets drunk and then blabs all sorts of stuff, and picks quarrels with his best friends."

"The boy Weston is as little to my mind," replied Johnson. "I believe, in truth, that if the fire was burning his nails, he would tell tales out of school. I don't trust him."

"We will hope that his courage will never be put to the test," said Rawson, very earnestly. "Who knows what any of us might do in such a case? There is something uncommonly tempting in the idea of saving one's own hide at the expense of one or two others that don't cover our own backs. With us, indeed, it's different, for I don't think it would help us much to turn state's evidence; and if—"

"The less we say about it the better," replied Johnson, coolly, as he looked at the priming of his rifle. "Where do we leave the horses?"

"At the widow Fuller's. Weston knows all about it, and he will stop for them there."

"Good! Do you now go straight to the road, and follow it, while I keep in the wood; it is best we shouldn't be seen together."

"Good luck in the meanwhile!"

"Good luck!"

Rawson, who had now reached the place where he had tied his horse, leaped into the saddle, and rode at a brisk trot to the road. When here, he gave his beast the reins, and spurred onward at a gallop, until he saw the peaceful roof of his betrothed shining at a distance. He now drew upon the bridle, approached the house at a sober pace, and dismounted before the door. But, although welcomed with delight by Mrs. Roberts, and with friendly warmth by Marion, yet he did not remain long. He informed them that he had come to take leave of them for a few days, partly because his duty called him to preach the word of the Lord in the northern part of county, and partly because business compelled him to go to the Arkansas river, where he was to receive a portion of the money which he expected.

"Soon, my dear Marion," he continued, taking the hand of the trembling maiden, who turned slightly pale—"soon the warmest wish of my soul will be fulfilled, and, with the help of the Lord, we will set up our tent in peace together. It is not good that man should be alone. This restless, roaming life is too wearisome for me; this riding back and forth often compels me to seek a night's lodging in places which I should otherwise shun."

"The men of Arkansas," said Marion, in a whisper, "are not averse to sleeping in the open air. Mr. Rawson has never tried it, perhaps."

"Yes, dear Marion, yes, but it does not agree with me. I have passed the years of my youth; wherefore should I seek out hardships which I can avoid? But farewell, dear maiden. May Heaven protect you in the meanwhile; but first let us send up a fervent prayer to the Lord, that He may bless our weak endeavors, and be gracious to us."

With these words, he drew from his pocket a small prayer-book, bound in black, which he always carried about him, and with a loud voice began his devotion. The women kneeled by their chairs, and Marion gazed with moist eyes over her folded hands out at the clear blue heavens. Her thoughts were far, far away. She did not hear the harsh voice of the hypocrite at her side, who repeated his monotonous, well-known phrases, with the same feelings, perhaps, with which the wandering piper plays his thousand-fold-repeated tune; her glances were fastened upon the bright, vaulted dome of her Creator, and, though her lips were pressed in silence against her delicate fingers, yet her heart communed with her God.

"Rub down the horses a bit—in an hour I must be off again!" cried a voice without the house, addressing one of the negroes. "Come in, Harper, and rest a minute," continued Roberts, for it was he; "what should send you home now? Well, I'm tired myself—but, holla! they are at prayers again," he added, softly, turning to his friend. "Plague upon the preacher! as if a man had nothing to do but to hitch around upon his knees all the while—as if that was affording the Almighty any great pleasure!—Tom, fetch us a couple of stools from the house!" he cried in a louder

tone, addressing the negro, who had just taken the saddles from the horses. Rawson, however, had heard the arrival of the two men, and concluded his prayer as the negro entered the apartment. The men now made their appearance without further ceremony.

"Good-morning, ladies!" said Harper. He looked pale and wretched; his eyes were sunk in their sockets, his limbs could scarcely sustain the weight of his body; he sank faintly upon a chair.

"Mr. Harper—for Heaven's sake, what is the matter?"

"Nothing—I think—it will pass over—a drink of water, if you please."

Marion took the long-handled gourd which lay in the water-pail, and reached it to the old man.

"There has been a murder committed," said Roberts, hitching his chair near the chimney, and gazing steadfastly before him; "a murder—a frightful murder—Heathcote has been killed!"

"Heathcote!" cried Rawson, staring upon him with open eyes. "Heathcote who says that?"

"I have seen the body."

"Seen the body?"

"Yes, seen the body. Brown has slain him. Why, what's the matter with the girl? Marion—nonsense! what's the use of swooning when a murder is spoken of; it isn't the first by a good deal that she has heard of."

"Say nothing of the money here," whispered Harper, who had approached him softly, "let us first see if we can't get upon the track of the other."

"Don't be uneasy," replied Roberts; "of that, I believe Brown is innocent."

Rawson had stood for a moment, as if occupied in fervent prayer; he now raised his eyes, breathed a deep sigh, and said, shuddering:

"It is frightful—dreadful—so young, and already a murderer and a thief!"

"A thief!" cried Harper, starting fiercely from his seat.

"Did not Heathcote say in this very house that he carried a considerable sum about him? do you think the murderer has buried the money with him? Marion gazed at her father in anxious expectation, as if awaiting his answer. Roberts did not speak, but looked in silence at the fire that was burning upon the hearth.

"Heathcote was a great sinner," continued Rawson, in a stern voice, "but to die thus, to pass away thus in his iniquities—it is frightful! Where was the fearful deed committed, Mr. Roberts?"

"On the Petit-Jean—we found the tracks, and Assowaum fished the body from the river."

The preacher was silent for several minutes, and gazed before him as if lost in thought; then he rose suddenly, and fixing his eyes steadfastly upon Roberts, asked:

"But how do you know that Brown was the murderer?"

"He was seen the same morning in that quarter," said Roberts, sighing; "but there were two engaged in the business. And then Brown had had a quarrel the day before with the murdered man, who uttered the most violent threats against him."

"Abominable! awful!" cried Rawson, in pious indignation. "I will go myself to the Petit-Jean; perhaps the murderer may be overtaken."

"Mr. Rawson, it was on your account that the unfortunate young man began the quarrel with the deceased," said Marion, gazing earnestly at her betrothed.

"Marion," exclaimed her mother, indignant at the boldness of the usually so gentle girl, "how do you dare—"

"Leave the maiden in peace, sister Roberts," replied Rawson, mildly. "She judges from outward impressions, and who can blame her? God alone sees the heart, and knows how to prove it."

"It would help you little to arrest my nephew," said Harper, rising angrily from his seat. "We are all ready to testify to the threats which Heathcote uttered against him. Not a jury in all Arkansas would find him guilty—besides, in a week he will be back to defend himself."

"He is coming back?" cried Rawson, quickly.

"God be thanked! then he is not guilty!" exclaimed Marion, in the joy of her heart.

"Miss Marion seems to take great interest in the young man," observed Rawson.

"In every innocent man," said the lovely girl, blushing at the warmth with which she had espoused the cause of one who was almost a stranger to her.

"That is praiseworthy and commendable," replied the preacher, in a friendly tone; "may the Lord bless thee for it, and may he preserve thee in thy unsuspecting simplicity. Thou hast not had the bitter experience we have had—and may you never!" He now approached Mrs. Roberts, and spoke a few words to her in an undertone; then kissed his betrothed respectfully upon the forehead, and followed the two men, who, after a brief farewell, had mounted their horses, which stood before the door. Here he leaped upon a small and active pony, and rode slowly up the broad road, which led between two fields of corn to a narrow path, that, turning to the north-west, ran to the Arkansas.

"Mother," said Marion, after a long and painful pause, when they were alone together; "mother, I can not love this man—my heart is a stranger to the feelings which I must feign to him at the altar."

"My child!" cried the good dame, in terror, as she grasped her daughter's hand; "pray there is nothing in the world so strengthening as fervent prayer when the tempter draws nigh. You know that Mr. Rawson has your promise and mine—you know that his whole happiness depends upon this marriage, and by the side of so holy a man you will be enabled to attain that state of purity and grace, of which you are now devoid. Mr. Rawson hopes, as he has just informed me, to dispatch his business before the appointed time, and in fourteen days you will be married. Be a good child, as you have always been, and you will be as happy as you deserve to be."

Marion sunk upon her mother's bosom and sobbed aloud.

CHAPTER X.

It was election day in Perryville. A sheriff and clerk were to be chosen for the county; three candidates appeared for the former office, and two for the latter. The first candidate for the sheriffship, a substantial farmer of the neighborhood, Cowles by name, had produced a powerful impression in his favor, by a good dinner which he had given to his fellow-citizens on the preceding Fourth of July. Even now he always carried a small bottle of whisky in one pocket, and a piece of tobacco in the other, and it was said that he dispensed them very liberally, whenever there was the slightest hope of obtaining a vote. The second was a German, who had lived for many years in the country, and who kept a small store up the river. The third was a farmer from the Arkansas, who had formerly held the office, but had not been re-elected, as he drank somewhat too freely for the good people, who, however, were usually quite indulgent in this respect. "Three times a week," many said, "they wouldn't mind, but drunk every day was too much." It was now said that he had reformed, however, and that he expected to get a great number of votes. Vattel, in truth, was a very honest fellow, always ready with his jest, and always ready, also, to stand up to his man when it was necessary to maintain the dignity of his office.

The polls were to be opened at two o'clock, and the farmers and hunters who had already repaired thither, and who were assembled in and around the little cabin, in which stood a table with writing materials, were while away the time to the best of their abilities.

The building was a common log-hut, with a bed in one corner, and a table in the other; rifles were standing around against the walls; from every nail, or peg, rather, for there was no great superfluity of iron in the house, hung ball-pouches and powder-horns, while stretched, partly upon blankets, partly upon the rough floor, lay several backwoodsmen conversing with animation concerning the pasture, game, etc., and especially of a gold mine said to have been lately discovered in the mountains of the La Fave.

The most remarkable group, however, was composed of those who lay or sat upon and around the bed. Upon its lower edge was seated a tall and withered form, in a threadbare, sky-blue frock of cotton stuff, the back of which was made of very different material from that which composed the collar and sleeves. Upon his head he wore an old

felt hat, in three sides of which he had cut holes, for the purpose of admitting the fresh air; a similar experiment had been undertaken with his shoes, less, as it seemed, however, for the sake of air, than for the relief of his corns; and his pantaloons, which were held together about the knees by deer-skin thongs, looked as variegated as the map of the United States, of which it was Robin's pride that he was a free citizen. An old, well-worn ball-pouch of leather hung at his right side, and a small knife, with a wooden handle, was thrust in the belt, which hindered the above-described pantaloons from entirely deserting the body, to which they seemed indeed scarcely to belong.

Notwithstanding his independent exterior, however, he sat very patiently upon his sharp, uncomfortable seat, and scraped away upon a violin in so frightful a manner, that the dogs, who were sunning themselves without the hut, moved to and fro in their places, and were evidently irresolute whether they should desert the nice warm spot or endure the discordant sounds any longer. The men in the hut seemed not to remark the music; they talked and laughed without paying the slightest attention to the player; one alone, a fair-haired young farmer, who, stretched comfortably, at full length, upon the bed, lay with his feet toward the musician, seemed to take a particular interest in the performance of the absorbed artist, for he followed the melody, whistling it quite accurately, although in a different key. The player, however, did not change his tune, but fiddled it over and over, until, at last, his patient auditor grew weary, and giving this second Paganini a slight thrust with his toe to arouse his attention, he cried:

"Confound it, Robin! hero I have been lying for half an hour, and whistling the same tune—don't you know anything else? So—that's right! Yankee Doodle," and sinking again upon the pillow, from which he had just slightly risen, he began to whistle the new piece with all his might.

"But what was done with the body?" asked a farmer from the mouth of the La Fave. "I haven't heard about that part of it."

"Why, nothing more was done with it," replied another; "the men who found it covered it with branches, and when we heard of it, we all went out to follow the tracks, and to find out the other fellow who had had a hand in the business. But you know how terribly it rained in the afternoon, and nothing more could be done."

"Brown actually shot him, then?"

"Why, of course," said the justice of the peace who now approached them, "that was to be expected. Who would let a man walk around alive who had threatened him in that fashion? But I should like to find out the other chap—he could have had no reason for the murder."

"It was well done of the Indian to dive, and hook up the body; a man would have to give me a good deal to get me to do it."

"Oh, these red-skins are used to things of that sort. Without him we should never have found out who the murdered man was, for no one would have thought of Heathcote."

"If the Indian hadn't behaved so well in the business, I should almost suspect him," said the justice. "Brown and the red-skin have always been hand and glove, and it would be no great wonder if they had pulled in the same yoke here."

"Have the Regulators chosen another leader?"

"They are to meet at Bowitt's next Sunday to settle that and other matters besides. They are on the track of several that don't off."

"But is it true that the murdered man was robbed?"

"He had money about him the same morning—that I know for certain," said Cook, the young man who was lying upon the bed, and who now ceased whistling for a moment. "He carried it in a small leathern pocket-book, in the breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt; it was gone when they found him; of course, the murderers must have taken it!"

"Not Brown—I would swear to that!" said the justice. "I take him to be an honest fellow, and it seems to me very singular that he should have needed help to silence that boaster, Heathcote."

"Robin," said Cook, bestowing a second friendly thrust with his toe upon the above-named personage, "Robin, if you don't soon stop with your Yankee Doodle, I'll bring the

dogs in; don't you know more than two pieces?"

Robin now struck up Washington's March, and Cook was quiet again.

"Gentlemen," said the justice of the peace, "it's time for us to begin; it must be two o'clock; and then, we want a clerk. Who will undertake the office, beh? Cook, you can write?"

"Yes, my name."

"You, then, Smith—or Hopper—or Morse—what! Can none of you write down a list?"

"There comes Hecker, the German; he can write," said Robin, pointing to the open door with his bow.

"Ha, Hecker!" cried the justice, "have you an hour to spare to write down a list?"

"Yes, two or three," replied the man thus addressed, as he entered the apartment, "only I want to be at the Salt-lick about dark, over on the other side of the hill; if I start from here by five, I shall get there time enough."

"Good! place your rifle then in the corner yonder—is it loaded?"

"Do you think I carry an empty barrel around with me in the wood?"

"Well, set it down carefully then. I'm always afraid that the confounded thugs will do mischief."

Hecker, a young German, who lived by hunting, moved his stool to the table, drew his broad hunting-knife from the sheath, as it incommoded him while sitting, laid it in front of him, and said to Smith, who sat next him:

"Couldn't some one persuade Robin and Cook to stop their frightful music? it will make the dogs sick."

"It will be difficult; they both think wonders of their performance. But here comes Wells; what can bring him here? He don't commonly come to election."

"He's got wolves, I'll bet!" cried the justice; "bravo, Wells! that's well done! the beasts do mischief enough."

"Good-afternoon, all," said the hunter, as he entered the hut, and cast three bloody wolves' scalps upon the table, "good-afternoon, justice! there, give me the certificate, or buy them of me; I should prefer the latter, for I am not much troubled with taxes."

"Take care, Wells!" said Hecker, laughing, as he wiped the wolf's blood from the ruled sheet of paper with the sleeve of his hunting-shirt, "if that's all the same to you, lay the wet things under the table—I can write better without—"

"Have I dirtied the paper? I'm sorry; but you can write well enough—it's only on one of the corners. Here, judge, three times three is nine—"

"Yes, nine dollars for three wolves' scalps—that's right enough; but you must first swear that you killed them yourself, and in this county—"

"I can't do that—I only caught them, afterward my dog killed them."

"It's all the same whether they were killed by you or your dogs, or your traps—come, swear to that."

"Well, d—n me, if it isn't a fact."

"Well, that's good," cried Cook, from the bed, giving Robin, another gentle thrust; "that deserves Yankee Doodle!"

"God bless me, Wells!" said the judge, smiling, "that isn't the proper oath; but the clerk will administer it, and now to business."

"What day of the month is it?" asked Hecker.

"The twenty-seventh."

"And what day of the week?"

"Lord help us! why he doesn't even know the day of the week. Why, it's Friday."

"When a man lies for a week or so out in the woods, he gets quite confused," said Hecker, laughing, "I thought it was Sunday."

One of the farmers now stepped forward. Hecker wrote down his name. "Good evening, Henshaw," he then added, as the man gave in his vote.

"Robin, for G—d's sake, stop that infernal scraping!" cried the justice, angrily, "it's frightful!"

"I haven't got any rosin," said Robin, quietly proceeding with his performance. "Smith, put your hand under the table; you'll find some, I reckon, in the little leathern bag that's hanging to one of the legs."

"Oh, put your fiddle away; it's enough to give a man a headache."

"Well, put your fingers in your ears if you don't want to hear, and go to —," cried

Alapaha, the Squaw.

Robin, highly offended, and he stalked out of the chamber.

"Your name?" said the justice to a second, who came forward to give in his vote.

"Catlin."

"How long have you lived in the State?"

"Seven months."

"How long in the county?"

"Eight weeks."

"Can you swear to it?"

"Yes."

"Administer the oath, clerk."

The latter rehearsed the formula somewhat rapidly, held the Bible for him to kiss, and ended with the usual—"So help you God!"

"He is in great need of it," said Cook, yawning and turning on the bed.

The election continued for two hours, until all present had given in their votes, and the justice was about to close the polls, when those who stood without the hut announced the approach of old Barker, who was seen trotting briskly toward the house, on a rough-haired pony.

"Before you close, gentlemen," he cried, as he entered the chamber, "before you close—well, it's time enough. Hurrah for Vattel! he's the man, my boys—he drinks his glass now and then, but that's nothing—ready for business the next morning. Here's my vote for Vattel!"

"It was time you came, Barker," said Hecker, "I was just going; it's now past five, and I have three miles to walk."

"Where to?"

"To the nearest salt-lick; will you go with me?"

"The d—l take your salt-licks! we'll stay here together, eh, boys! to-night we'll have a spree. I won't go home until I can't go, and then I can stay with a good conscience."

"Good, Barker!" cried Cook, who now approached the table, "I like that—I've brought two deerskins with me; we'll drink them up—election doesn't come every day."

"Well, I must go!" cried Hecker.

"Go to the d—l, for all I care," said Barker. "Boys, I'll fetch the whisky! I don't like to sit in the store over the way; it's so dark and gloomy like. But come, Hecker, take a drink first, for it's no joke to sit out yonder all night, as dry as a bone. God help us, when the time comes that I can't shoot my deer by daylight, I'll give it up; but I won't hinder you—take your own way—I sha'n't have to nurse you when you're sick."

"By-the-by, Curtis," said the justice, "you promised to catch me a young bear this spring; my wife is crazy to have one; can't you do it?"

"It's rather too late now; by May the little varmint are running around like horses. I've been trying to get one for myself; they are such very amusing creatures."

"Nonsense!" cried Barker, "cubs are awkward things in a house; before they are a year old, they knock the pitchers and glasses from the shelves, pull the cloth from the table with all that's on it, overturn the beehives, fight with the pigs, and shake the peach-trees. No, no, there's many another animal that's harmless and just as amusing. In North Carolina, I had a tame herring that followed me all over the house."

"Stop, Barker! don't trip," cried the justice, laughing, "a herring on dry land! how long could it live, I should like to know?"

"Live!" rejoined the old hunter, warmly, "live! an animal can get used to anything; it had been thrown in its youth upon a sand-bank, and had never seen water again; all I had to do was to give it fresh sand every day. Now I have a little pig," continued Barker, without suffering a second interruption, "a curious thing; it's spotted like a fawn, and its little tail is screwed on so uncommon tight, that it hasn't had its hind legs to the ground for these three weeks."

"Hurrah for Barker!" cried Cook.

"What was that?" exclaimed Smith. "It seemed to me as if I heard a shot."

"Yes—I think I heard one too," said Cook. "It must have been Hecker."

"Hallo, house!" cried a voice, suddenly, from without, which was answered by the loud barking of the dogs.

"Some one called," said the justice.

"Hallo, house!" re-echoed the voice without, and now so loudly, that it rose above the barking and yelping of the dogs.

"Hallo, outside! what's the matter?"

"Bring a light here, will you?"

"Who is there?"

"Hatfield, from Spring Creek. And, friends, can I get pine-wood here, or a few pounds of wax, to make torches?"

"Yes," answered Castley, the proprietor of the dwelling; "I have no wax, indeed, but pine enough; it must be split first, though. In the meanwhile, dismount and come in. Be quiet, dogs!"

"Hatfield? what the deuce brings you here at this time of night?" asked the justice, stepping to the door, followed by Cook. "Who have you with you?"

"Friends from Spring Creek," replied Hatfield. He then exchanged a few words with his companions, dismounted, and entered the house.

"Good-evening, gentlemen! Is there any one among you who is acquainted with the roads of the La Fave, and who is willing to be our guide for a few hours?"

"What is the matter? Are you in pursuit of any one?"

"Some rascally knaves stole six horses of mine on Wednesday night. Fortunately, I discovered it the next morning—on the same night, indeed—for a couple of my horses that are out at pasture came to the house, which they never do, unless they are disturbed by strangers or by the wolves. Of course, I couldn't follow the tracks in the dark; but before daybreak I called the neighbors together, and as soon as it was light we set out in pursuit of them. The trail was broad enough, as you may suppose, but after a short time it divided—the tracks of three of the horses turning to the right and three to the left. We naturally supposed that this was a trick to lead those astray who might pursue them; but, as there were five of us, we separated too, and followed them over the northern ridges of the Petit-Jean, and through the Magazine mountains—across and around such frightful, stony places, that I can't yet understand how the beasts could have stood it. This naturally took up much time, for the knaves had ridden zigzag, and sometimes across spots where the track of a hoof could scarcely be seen; but at last they must have thought themselves safe, for at the head of Panther's creek, where it flows to the south, toward the Petit-Jean, they had united again, and from there they rode in the open wood toward the river until they reached the road, which they did, probably, last evening.

From there, with all imaginable insolence, they kept for awhile upon the high road. At daylight it seemed as if they had entered the wood again and rested, to let the horses blow a little, or to feed them—Heaven knows how they came by the corn! it was stolen, at any rate. We also were obliged to rest for a short time, for we didn't want to push our beasts over-hard, as we were now pretty sure of the scoundrels. Since dark, we have been following the high-road, as they struck into it again a few miles from here; and we now thought it best to proceed carefully, and to follow their tracks slowly through the night with torches. In this way we sha'n't knock up our horses; and, besides, we shall lose no time. But as, at all events, they must have crossed the river, we should like to have some one with us who knows the ford, that we may not be delayed unnecessarily.

"You do well to keep upon their tracks," said Cook, "for it's sure to rain before morning—the sun set very suspicious."

"I think so too," replied Hatfield, "and that's a reason the more why we should pursue them with all speed. Oh, that's fine enough, Castley—that'll answer. If the scoundrels have followed the high-road through the night, which I don't doubt for a moment, why, by daybreak, we must overtake them, or at least be pretty close to their heels."

"But why should they follow the road?" inquired Cook. "I don't think it possible that they would take the horses across to Hot Springs. The only hope they could have of escaping—that is, if they were not followed at once—would be to reach the Arkansas; and still they must have reckoned upon immediate pursuit, or at least have been prepared for it."

"That's true," answered Hatfield, thoughtfully, "but we shall see when we reach the other bank of the La Fave. If they make for the Arkansas, they must strike through the wood to reach the lower road. In that case, we can do nothing but wait till morning; but if they have crossed the La Fave, and followed the road on the other bank, it's a sure sign that

they are going to Hot Springs, and we can then ride in after them at our ease, along the broad road."

"If we only knew where to find the Indian!" said the justice; "he's capital upon a trail, and would be of essential service; but Heaven knows where he keeps himself!"

"Perhaps it was he we met above by the salt-lick; he didn't speak very plain English, but it was quite dark, and I couldn't see his face very well."

"No, that was a German. But did the tracks pass there?"

"Yes, within four hundred paces; they must have been very near. He told us that he had seen two persons pass, but that he didn't recognize them, though the figure of one of them seemed familiar to him. To think, that two of the varmint have carried off all the six beasts! They must understand the business."

"Who can they be?" cried the justice. "I shouldn't wonder if that rascal Cotton had a hand in the affair. He has been seen about here lately, and the constable had a warrant to arrest him, but he must have got wind of the matter, for all at once he was off again, or at least he doesn't show himself."

"The fellow will end his days in the State-prison," said Smith.

"The State-prison!" cried Hatfield, angrily. "Do you think we shall stand upon much ceremony with him, if we catch him with the horses? Do you see this?" With these words he drew a thin cord made of twisted leather from his pocket, and held it toward the judge. "As true as my name is Hatfield, the knave shall hang on the tree we catch him under. He shall have as much time to pray as it takes to make the noose—not a second more. We must show the scoundrels that we are in earnest, or they will draw the very hide over our ears."

"But the laws!" said the justice of the peace, shaking his head.

"The laws are very good for the places where they are made; they answer well enough for the cities, but here in the woods it is a different thing. Here we are obliged to protect ourselves, and as long as we have to do that, we will enforce our own laws; and when the time comes that I have to look to others for protection, why, I'll move further westward. Well, who will go with us?"

Cook, Curtis and several others were at once ready; and headed by Curtis—who, being an old settler, was acquainted with every foot of the way—they soon reached the road, which, running from north to south, was intersected by the river La Fave; they followed this toward the stream, discovering in the soft earth the hoof-prints which Hatfield swore he could recognize among thousands as those of his own beasts.

In the meanwhile the sky had become overcast, and a fine and penetrating rain began to fall; but, although it gradually soaked the garments of the pursuers, it had not yet effaced the tracks.

CHAPTER XI.

On the same afternoon on which the scene occurred which we have described in the preceding chapter, Assowaum, the Feathered Arrow, followed by his wife, walked silently through the wood, along the right bank of the La Fave. His blanket was thrown across his back, and his long rifle rested upon his shoulder. In conformity with the Indian custom, Alapaha carried the few cooking-utensils in use with these children of the forest, together with a woolen blanket and two dressed deerskins. She followed noiselessly in the footsteps of her spouse and chief, who glanced slowly and attentively at either bank of the stream, as if seeking for some object which he was unable to find.

When he thought he had gone high enough up the river he returned and renewed his search, but with no better success than before.

"Is not this the tree to which the canoe is usually tied?" he said, at last, stopping and turning to his wife, while he pointed to an old, weather-beaten ash, whose snow-white branches seemed to stretch like gigantic spectral arms toward the dark and massive clouds that were piled above them.

"Assowaum can see a piece of the bark by which it was tied," said Alapaha, bending over the steep bank and pointing to a projecting root of the tree to which a few strips of bark were hanging.

"The canoe is gone," replied Assowaum,

"and we must swim across, if we would camp on the other side."

Without uttering a word, Alapaha laid aside her pack, and, aided by the chief, rolled two logs into the river, to form a sort of raft, upon which they placed the few articles which she carried, to keep them from getting wet in crossing, and soon both were climbing up the steep bank on the opposite side of the stream.

"And what path does Alapaha follow?" asked the Indian, pausing and gazing calmly at his young and beautiful wife.

"Half a mile up the river we cross a path. This path leads straight to the house of Mr. Bowitt, and Mr. Rawson has promised to preach there to-morrow. Will not Assowaum listen to the white man's words? He speaks well; his words are honey, and his heart is pure as the autumn sky."

"Alapaha, it would be better if— Ha! what is that?"

A slight rustling was heard in the dry leaves, and the next moment a stately stag came from the thicket, raised his noble head aloft, and, foreboding no danger, looked quietly and securely around. At the first sound of the crackling leaves, Assowaum had cocked his rifle; he now raised it slowly to his cheek, and in an instant the stag, struck by the fatal bullet, leaped high in the air, and then fell dead upon the earth.

"Good!" said the Indian, as he reloaded his rifle, "very good! Mr. Harper has no more meat, and is too sick to hunt in the woods. Alapaha will carry the meat to his hut."

"Has not Assowaum heard that Alapaha is upon the way to listen to God's word?" inquired the squaw, in a whisper; and, bending her slender frame, she muttered a low prayer.

"There was a time," replied Assowaum, gazing darkly before him—"there was a time when Alapaha listened to the voice of the 'Feathered Arrow,' and forgot the rustling of the tree-tops and the singing of the spirit-bird; there was a time when she turned her back to the God of the white man, and lifted her hands to the Manitou of her people; there was a time when she wove the sacred wampum for her husband, and the mysterious emblem brought him good fortune in the chase. That time is gone; Alapaha is dead, and a Christian lives in her place. She still wears the moccasins with which she left her tribe, and followed her husband from his home; she still wears the kerchief about her temples which Assowaum tore from the shoulders of that wild chief of the Sioux, and brought to his wigwam to adorn the brows of his wife; she still wears the string of the rattles of the sacred snake, whose tones should remind her of the land of her fathers. But now her ear is closed—it does not hear; and her heart is closed—it does not feel."

"Assowaum," said the beautiful woman, in low and trembling tones, "Assowaum, be not angry! See—this life is short, and before me I behold a bright and happy future. Assowaum does not know how beautiful is the heaven of the white man! Would he rob me of it—of all that is dear and sacred to me in life, except my duty toward him?"

"Good!" returned Assowaum; "Alapaha may go and worship the God of the whites—it is well!"

"And will Assowaum never listen to the words of the holy man from whose lips Manitou speaks?"

Assowaum extended his right arm, and was about to reply. Another thought, however, seemed suddenly to cross his mind; for he threw his rifle across his shoulder, and said:

"Alapaha cannot pray always; she must eat too. On the bank of the river, not far from here, stands a small hut—no one in it; we will carry the flesh there, and Alapaha may dry it this evening. The house will protect her against the storm that is coming, and to-morrow she will not have far to go to the settlement, where the pale man speaks of his God."

"And Assowaum?—"

"Has given the little man his promise that he would come to see him soon. He will keep his promise. The white men speak evil of their brother. He is far—he will come back, and the guilty will be silent, and look up to him."

"But he is bad—"

"What serpent has breathed its poison into Alapaha's ear! She has listened to the tones of the Machinito, and casts dust upon the hand that has done good to her."

"Mr. Rawson says that the son of the little

man has slain his brother, and then robbed him."

"The pale man lies!" cried the Indian, raising his head aloft, while the blood rose to his forehead, and his eyes flashed fire. "The pale man lies!" he repeated, "and—he knows it!"

"Assowaum is angry at the Christian, because he has turned Alapaha from the faith of her people. Assowaum is brave and noble; he will abuse no man because he thinks otherwise than he."

"Let us carry the flesh to the hut," said the Indian, breaking off the conversation—"it grows late; Assowaum must walk miles before it is dark." With skillful hand he now cut the stag in pieces, removed the shoulder-blades, neck, and head, from the skin, leaving them for the wolves or buzzards, and hung the rest upon a stick, one end of which he took, while Alapaha laid the other upon her shoulder, and thus they walked onward in silence, and soon reached the hut.

It was a rudely constructed log-cabin, built by a former settler, who, after occupying it a short time, had left it, as the land around was very low, and exposed to inundations from the river. The roof and walls were still in a tolerable state of repair; in other respects, however, it did not afford the slightest imaginable convenience, for even the chimney had fallen in, and the bare earth formed its only floor. The absence of a chimney, however, was by no means an obstacle in the way of lighting a fire, for numerous crevices in the walls afforded a free outlet to the smoke, and the wind roared and whistled through the wide rents between the logs, and, howling above the moss-covered roof, swept down over the river, which wound its way close to the unfriendly spot, from which it was separated, nevertheless, by wild bushes that had grown up since the removal of its original proprietor.

Assowaum now reached the spot with his wife, and carried the flesh into the interior of the dwelling. The door had fallen from its wooden hinges, and lay prostrate before the entrance. Assowaum gazed for a moment around the vacant building, and then said:

"Gagait onesheshin weegeewomid. The house is good, and will give Alapaha shelter. When she comes back from her pious path, she will carry the flesh to the little man's hut. Assowaum will be with her before the whip-poor-will has sung for the third time." With these words, he turned, and walked in silence into the forest.

Alapaha, in the meanwhile, did as her husband had directed her; with the tomahawk which he had left behind, she hewed the slender sticks to form a frame upon which to dry the flesh; she then brought wood and kindled a bright fire, cut the flesh in strips, placed them upon the frame, and bung it over the flame and smoke.

The sky, in the meanwhile, had become more and more overcast, a fine rain was falling and the wind rushed, wildly and gloomily, through the tree-tops that overhung the roof. Alapaha cowered near the crackling flame, softly humming a hymn which she had learned from the whites, and waited for the approach of night to prepare her couch, watching the steaming venison in the meanwhile.

The region round about was not so solitary and deserted, however, as Alapaha probably imagined. While she was thus busied with her task, a young man stepped from the thicket on the other side of the river, about half a mile up the stream, and carefully avoiding to tread upon the soft soil of the road, looked impatiently to the opposite bank, as if awaiting the approach of some person. The air was far from being warm, and he now rubbed his hands, now thrust them under his arms, now leaned against an overhanging beech-tree, and often seemed about to pace impatiently upon the leaf-covered earth, but as often checked himself, and glancing restlessly upon the spot on which he trode, as if his footprints were plainly visible, and easily to be distinguished there. He was soon joined by a comrade, who was wrapped in a woolen blanket, with an old beaver-hat drawn down over his forehead, his rifle beneath his arm, in order to protect the lock as much as possible from the falling rain; he approached the other softly, and asked him with a laugh:

"Well, Weston, are you getting tired, heh? you shake—why didn't you bring your blanket with you? I told you—have you heard nothing yet?"

"Nothing," replied Weston, moodily, "and

I don't believe they'll come this evening; that would be a fine affair! If I am to pass the whole night here without a blanket, I shall be a corpse by to-morrow morning."

"That would be a loss of twenty dollars to the sheriff," cried Cotton, laughing, for this worthy personage was the young man's companion; "but I don't think we shall have to wait long. Rawson is acquainted with every crook and corner there, and Johnson too, for that matter—they'll find it easy. Besides, you said that Rawson had appointed a prayer-meeting to-morrow noon in the settlement; so that he will do all in his power to keep his engagement, and excite no suspicion. I can't bear the hypocritical scoundrel, but he's a capital hand at business, that's a fact, a man can see that he comes from Yankee-land."

"Heathcote's death is making a great stir among the people—Brown is said to have murdered him—and your name is mentioned in the business."

"My name! what in the d—l's name do they mix me up in the matter for? I have never seen the fellow in all my life. Must I bear the blame of every deviltry that's played here?"

"That can't make much difference to you," said Weston, laughing; "and then they don't put the murder on your shoulders, only the robbery."

"What robbery?"

"They say that the murdered man had the money for three good horses in his pocket—four or five hundred dollars—and it's gone."

"Thunder! that would have been worth the trouble—two birds with one stone—a Regulator and a heap of ready money—Brown isn't so stupid as I thought him—but—listen, Weston! Brown has never had anything to do with us—what was the Regulator to him?"

"I don't know; the women in the settlement say that he and Brown were after the same girl, and so they quarreled—but that is nothing to us; the main thing is that we are rid of Heathcote; in what way is all one to us."

"Well, Hatfield isn't a man to be trifled with, either, and if he scents us out, the business will be serious—I don't see how we can mix up the tracks, so that the rascals won't be able to follow us; I'm sure of one thing, if I were upon your trail, you would find it hard to get off."

"Never fear," cried Weston, laughing. "Rawson has planned the business most cunningly. See! before they come to the river they'll ride along the high road again."

"Along the high road?" cried Cotton, in astonishment.

"Yes; along the high road, that their tracks may be clear and plain—then, into the river, and then—not out again."

"But which way? they can't stay in the water—which way?"

"Down the stream, till they are out of harm's way, and then out into the wide world."

"The beast won't be able to swim so long."

"For that reason I have hid Haswell's canoe up the river a-piece—you see there—under the bushes that hang over the stream—and just near it is another that I got below from the mouth of the river, from Stewart's—they'll think it has broke loose and floated down into the Arkansas. With the help of the two canoes, we can take the horses down without trouble until we reach the spot which Rawson has described to me, and from there you must convey them further, for I don't know the way to the 'island,' as you call it. In the meanwhile Johnson is to lead the pursuers upon a false track, and if he succeeds, we are both out of all danger, especially if it rains hard to-morrow. Then we will spur through the wood, and when we have once reached the Mississippi bottom, good-night, pursuit! Johnson has assured me that we shall find help and shelter there, and the rogues above here know that very well—they won't follow us as far as that."

"That's all very well, and sounds very fine; but the men from Spring Creek won't be such asses as to think that we have flown through the air with the horses."

"Of course not, but now comes the best part of it. Below here in the cane-brake—that is, not in the cane-brake, but at the edge of it—stand my horse and yours—"

"Mine?"

"Yours and Johnson's two grays. Before we start down the river with the fresh lot, these horses are to be brought up the stream, which is very shallow here, as far as the landing, then Johnson will mount and gallop along the road with the beasts, as if he were riding

toward Hot Springs. If our pursuers don't get here until to-morrow or the day after, and it rains stoutly in the meanwhile, the precaution would be unnecessary; but if they are close upon the hoofs of the stolen beasts, and I almost fear it, they'll naturally take the tracks that lead into the ford on the other side and those that lead out of it on this for one and the same, and will follow them without hesitation, or, what is the main thing, without dismounting and examining them. Then, if they overtake Johnson, why, he, of course, hasn't *their* horses, and knows nothing about them, and they will see, when it's too late, that they have been running after the wrong beasts."

"But if they don't overtake him?" inquired Cotton.

"So much the better—he'll then take the horses by a roundabout way to the island, tell the people there of the fresh lot that's on the road, and sell ours."

"What! my horse?"

"Don't be a fool, Cotton!" cried Weston, laughing; "you'll get the money for it."

"Yes, but how much? not half his value."

"And then," continued Weston, without noticing this interruption, "you won't let yourself be seen here by anybody, and you must leave the country very soon."

"But what has that to do with my horse?"

"Why, I am rather too well acquainted with you, to think that you would take leave of the La Fave on your own horse?"

"There you are right, Weston! that was a sensible speech," cried Cotton, laughing; "and do you know—"

"Don't scream so! who the d—l can tell if some one isn't creeping around in the woods? I heard shooting here this afternoon?"

"Do you know that I have already pitched upon a horse that pleases me uncommonly."

"And that is—"

"Roberts's bay—a noble beast."

"Well, Cotton, you are not so stupid; mounted on him you might laugh at pursuit. Hal! there would be a time of it again."

"The plan is a good one," said Cotton, thoughtfully; "yes, yes—Rawson is capital for business—and how gloriously he leads the women-folk in the settlement around by the nose. They would open their eyes if they were to see him this evening galloping through the wood with two or three horses to one string."

"Mrs. Roberts takes him for a real saint—well, that's nothing to me; it's a pity only for the young girl who is to marry him. But listen, Cotton, I have a question to ask of you—I hear of nothing nowadays but the 'island,' and as I am so soon to become acquainted with it, tell me something about it—what kind of an island is it, and where does it lie?"

"I can't tell tales out of school," replied Cotton mysteriously; "too many are concerned in the matter. I can tell you this though, it lies in the Mississippi, and the people there are well disposed toward us. But I've never set foot on it."

"In the Mississippi—bah!—there are a great many islands there—and as for their being well disposed—why, half of Arkansas is well disposed toward us, and five sixths of Texas—no, tell me something more—what number is it in the Mississippi? You know, I suppose, that the islands on the river are numbered, beginning up-stream."

"Do I know that?" cried Cotton, laughing scornfully; "but—I can't tell you more—you will know all about it soon enough; in a few days we shall be there—till then put the bridle on your curiosity. But stop! listen! what was that?"

"Hush!" cried Weston; "it was a whip-poorwill—that was to be the signal—can it be they? At any rate I'll answer it, for all is safe around here."

He placed his fingers to his lips, and uttered an admirable imitation of the shrill sound peculiar to that little bird.

"Ho, ho!" cried a voice, which they at once recognized as Johnson's, and the quick tramp of horses was now heard. The next moment their anxiously-expected comrades rode to the opposite bank, and waved their hats, in token of the success of their enterprise.

CHAPTER XII.

"HURRAH!" shouted Weston, his prudence forsaking him at the sight of the noble beasts, which at this moment descended the opposite bank, and stopped at the water's edge; "hurrah! those are horses!"

"Are you crazy?" cried Rawson, angrily, across to them. "How do you know but some one may be prowling around here? Shut your mouths, and spare your shouts until you have accomplished your share of the business. Where are the horses?"

"A little down the river, at the place agreed on," said Weston.

"Good—bring them up quickly—but be careful—no tracks near the shore—keep in deep water."

"Ay, ay—I know—I wasn't born yesterday."

The lad hastened to the place where he had left the horses, and soon returned, keeping the beasts, prudently, in the middle of the stream, which was here scarcely three feet deep.

"And now, where are the canoes?" inquired Rawson; "it's of no consequence if these horses here trample the ground for a while; for if they actually follow our track, they'll think that we were undecided whether to cross or not; but if we let the other beasts stand on the opposite shore, and cut up the soil, they will stop to examine why we waited there, and find out that they were different tracks; and then, Cotton's horse has such enormous hoofs."

Weston and Cotton at once disappeared in the cane-brake, and, after a short interval, glided back in the canoes.

"Stop!" cried Johnson, "no further—they mustn't see the print of the boats on the shore—so—come here in the middle—now take the horses—you had better get in, Rawson—so then—two in the large, and one in the small canoe—stop there—let me first change horses; ah! a weight is off my heart, now that I am upon the back of my own beast again!"

"Now show that you can ride, Johnson," said Rawson, as the other prepared to spur up the southern bank of the stream; "let the horses do all they can; they have rested—give them spur and whip, and remember that every quarter of an hour that we can lead our pursuers from the *right* track is worth gold."

"Never fear!" cried Johnson, laughing; "they must ride fast if they would overtake me, and if they do, I shall only laugh in their faces. I've been working ahead—I've told several of my acquaintances that I was going to take my horse, with some others, to the southern part of the State, as I expected to get a big price for them there."

"Away then!" replied Rawson; "the d—l trust them—who knows how soon they may come tramping after us, and they would catch us in a very interesting situation here—God help us, we should fare finely!"

"How are we off for provisions?" inquired Cotton.

"I sha'n't need any," cried Johnson, looking back as he reached the top of the bank; "the horses must rest now and then, and they might as well do this at a house."

"But not to-night—the fellows who are after us would hear of the colors of the horses; the roan and the two grays would rather startle them."

"Don't be uneasy—they shall hold out till to-morrow noon—good-by until we meet." With these words he thrust his spurs into the flanks of the beast which he bestrode, and the next moment disappeared down the road with the horses of the three accomplices.

"That part of it is settled then. Now, Cotton, we must see how we can best arrange it with these beasts. First of all, we had better clear out from here, and go a half-mile or so down the river. Here, on the right road, we are not only exposed to be seen by every traveler, but we run the risk of being surprised by the infernal Regulators at any moment—never mind tying them better at present, we can go down so a little while, they will probably have bottom all the way. We will arrange everything at the first sand-bank, and can have all in order before it's dark."

There was too much truth in these words to need a reply; the necessary arrangements, therefore, were at once made, and in a few minutes the boats, to each of which were tied three horses, glided around a bend in the stream, where they were effectually sheltered from the observation of any one upon the high road.

"So—I now feel a little more comfortable," whispered Rawson; "it's fast growing dark, and if our pursuers really follow us to-night, they can't help but fall into the trap we have set for them. Here is the sand-bank," he continued, as he pointed toward the left shore; "the beasts touch bottom, and we had better

put the bridles and halters in order a little, and assort the horses, for as soon as we have passed this bend in the river, the stream will be deep, and the beasts will have to swim the whole way. I examined it carefully this morning as I came up."

"If I'm not mistaken," said Cotton, looking toward the shore; "there must be a small, deserted hut near this sand-bank. We camped here two or three years ago, when I and Johnson went into the nation, but the bushes have grown up so thick around it that it can't be seen. Yes, this is the spot," he continued, as they brought the canoes to land. "I know it by that beech-tree that lies yonder—it fell the same night that we camped here, and if it had fallen the other way it would have been all over with us."

"Arkansas wouldn't have worn mourning," said Rawson, laughing.

"No, hardly, and many a—but we won't talk of that—what are you going to do?"

"We must fasten the small boat to the large one," said Rawson; "then we can take two horses on each side and two behind; we won't have to paddle much, for the current is quite swift: at any rate, one of us can then be of some use, if it is only by steering, the two others can attend to the horses and see that they don't get entangled. By twelve o'clock we ought to reach Devil's Creek—there I shall land and leave you to your fate. Don't spare the horses, and be careful to avoid the high road, when the wood is open enough to ride at a good pace. If they should hit upon the right tracks to-morrow, which can't be expected, nay, which is impossible, except by accident, why, you have twelve hours' start and good horses. Cotton, you know the way."

"I should think so," grumbled the latter. "I have been hunted upon it often enough—once with five horses in a string. When we have reached the Mississippi swamp we are beyond danger, for I know the way through the bayous and lagunes. There is one place there, in particular, that's safe as can be; when I am once through it, if I cut down a tree across the spot from the other side, it would take them a whole day to follow me on horseback. I have always kept the place in mind for a time of need."

"But where will you get an axe?"

"I hid mine there last month in a hollow tree—if I'm pressed I sha'n't want the tools."

"So—that will answer now," said Rawson, who had by this time finished arranging the boats to his liking. Now, Cotton, a word more as to what you have to do, and then we must be moving. Wilson knows the place where you are to land; it's where the wide flat stone stretches from the river up between the trees. There we shall leave no tracks in coming from the water. About a hundred paces down the river, where a pine and a paw-corn tree have fallen crosswise toward the stream, Atkins has promised to hide a bag of corn and other provisions—"

"Why don't you go with us as far as the spot?"

"I should leave tracks there," replied Rawson; "and that's impossible at Devil's Creek; from there I shall go around a ways over the mountains and return to the settlement in an opposite direction. I don't trust that d—d Indian, and they may, perhaps, send him out upon the trail; therefore I shall take every precaution possible. But haven't you anything to eat with you? I am as hungry as a hound—as we came here I thought I smelt venison roasting—I wish I had a piece now!"

"I left my handkerchief with corn-bread and venison in the cane-brake, where the horses stood," said Weston; "it's strange, but I forgot it—now it's too late to go for it, I suppose."

"The d—l you ought to have thought of that before—will no one find it?"

"No; it's well hid—but sha'n't we start?"

"Wait till Cotton has repaired the bridle," said Rawson; "if it should part on the way, it would delay us longer, and it might be too dark to amend it."

"But how did you get the horses, Rawson?" inquired Cotton, who was busily occupied in repairing a broken halter; "tell us about it now, for we sha'n't have much time for talking on the way."

"That I can do in a few words," replied Rawson, with a smile, while he quietly cut off a large piece of tobacco, and thrust it into his mouth. "Luckily we met no one on the road that knew us, and reached the fence corner, where Spring creek flows by, just at dusk,

about this hour. We had avoided the mill, and by the time the owls began to hoot, we were at the lot where the mares were. I didn't quite like the looks of things, for I had calculated upon finding the horses that were running at large, there already; there was no help for it, however, and Johnson and I climbed a tree; in the first place, to be safe against a surprise, and then to be able to observe the beasts as they came up. It was lucky we did so, for we were scarcely in the tree, when, hang me, if Hatfield himself—did you speak, Cotton?"

"No—why?"

"Why, I thought I heard a noise—Hatfield himself came along, with a couple of dogs, from hunting. If we had been on the ground, the beasts would have scented us out, and then good-night to Johnson, for Hatfield has a particular grudge against him; and, at any rate, the bridles we had with us would have betrayed us. Well, the confounded beasts snuffed around under the trees, raised their noses and scented awhile, so that we shook in our very shoes, but they soon ran barking after their master, who had ridden on before them a ways. We both were in a cold sweat, but in a minute or so the horses came up, and we felt easier. We examined them while it was still light, to pick out those that suited us best, bridled them, mounted and spurred on through the wood like a hurricane, once or twice I thought we should break our necks. To lead them astray, we rode in a zigzag around on the stony ground, struck into various directions, and then, when we thought ourselves safe, pushed on with less caution, but so much the faster."

"Didn't it frighten the other horses, when you snapped away their companions?"

"Yes, they snorted hard; and just as we had caught the last one by the mane, the rest dashed off, neighing and whinnying, galloped around the fence, and then probably into the wood again. This sorrel here pulled me around I suppose six times before I could make him stand quiet."

"Well, Hatfield will rave," cried Cotton, laughing, "to lose six horses at a stroke! The like was never heard of in Arkansas!"

"And the pious Rawson the leader of the party!" said Weston.

"Tell me, Rawson," asked Cotton, "what text will you preach from to-morrow morning? It's a pity I couldn't hear you; it would be worth the trouble."

"Confound it!" cried Rawson, in a tone of ill-humor, "to-morrow I shall give them nonsense enough; I shall be too inattentive—too anxious as to what has become of—you."

"Of the horses, you mean?"

"Well, yes, of the horses too; and there I must stand and gabble prayers, and whine out tedious, stupid hymns—"

"And sing out, 'Glory!' and catch the buxom widow when she swoons," interrupted Weston, laughing.

"And discourse devoutly with the handsome squaw," said Cotton. "I tell you what, Rawson, you havn't such a bad taste."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Rawson. "But, come, we must be going; I am getting chilled through and through, and the horses are freezing too. Has nobody got a drop of whisky? That rascal Johnson rode off with my bottle in his pocket, without saying a word. The d—l! leave us a drop: you pull away as if you meant to suck the air out."

Cotton reached him the flask, and Rawson took a long draught. He then corked it, and gave it back to him.

"Aha! that's good!" said Cotton, chuckling, "and it's warming too. I put a whole handful of Spanish pepper in: that's warming, I'm sure."

"It does one good on such an evening," replied Rawson, shivering. "This fine rain pierces to my very bones."

"So now we can start again," said Cotton, as he placed the mended bridle upon the horse's head. "Quick! we must leave here; it grows darker and darker every minute; and there, yon—there—up yon—der! Death and the d—l!" he added, quickly, in a whisper, "what's that? There's a light shining in the bushes!"

"Where?" cried Rawson, turning furiously. "Up there—it must be in the hut."

"There's something white lurking in the brush," said Weston whose sharp eye remarked the outlines of a form cowering in the dark bushes that grew along the bank of the river.

"Thunder and lightning?" cried Cotton,

"here's treachery!" And, like an arrow darting from the bow, he sprung up the bank, followed by Rawson, and the next moment stood opposite to the solitary being, who, from her station upon the shore, had watched the conduct of the men, and had overheard every word they uttered.

"Alapaha!" exclaimed Rawson, in dismay.

"The red-skinned woman!" cried Cotton, grinding his teeth, and almost as much surprised as terrified.

"Are you alone?" asked Rawson, quickly, to the squaw; "are you alone? Where is Assowaum?"

The poor woman was unable to reply. She stood, for awhile, rigid and erect, and gazed with an expression so solemn, nay, so sepulchral, at the cold face of the unmixed preacher, that the latter cast down his eyes; he was unable to endure that glance. It was but for a moment only, however, that the proud daughter of the forest stood towering before the man who had turned her from her faith in her God and her love for her spouse, and who now—she shuddered as she beheld him—was a thief and a robber. Then the thought of her boundless wretchedness rushed like a storm across her soul, when she remembered how she had denied the Great Spirit which her fathers adored in the rustling of the mighty forest and in the rippling of the quiet brook.

She concealed her face in her hands, and big, clear drops trickled between her closely-pressed fingers.

"The horses are getting restless," said Cotton, angrily. "What shall we do with this woman here?"

"Go—leave her to me," replied Rawson, in a whisper.

"Leave her to you? I believe you!" rejoined the hunter, with a scornful laugh; "but I ain't so stupid—it's no time for such foolery."

"Go on with the horses," continued Rawson, in a suppressed voice; "the river makes a bend here of three miles, but by land it's hardly a hundred paces, and I can easily overtake you. Go, then; Weston can't hold the beasts alone."

"And what do you mean to do with—"

"Never fear," answered Rawson, still in a whisper; "if any one is in danger from her prating, it's me."

"Have your own way, then, and be—but join us soon," cried Cotton. "The consequences be upon your own head if you keep us waiting." He sprung down the bank, stepping carefully upon the loose pebbles, and in a few seconds was gliding down the stream with the snorting, panting horses.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHERE is Assowaum?" asked Rawson, in a low but firm tone, when he found himself alone with the young squaw. The latter, however, seemed not to hear this question, or she was unwilling to answer it. Not a sound interrupted the stillness of the night, except the sobs of the poor woman, and the heavy breathing of the preacher.

"Where is Assowaum?" asked the latter, at last, a second time, and as he spoke his right hand grasped the arm of the weeping woman. But as if stung by a serpent, the unhappy creature started up, extricated herself from the grasp of the gloomy man, and, recoiling in terror, cried:

"Away! away! thy breath is poison, thy touch is death, thy tongue is double, and thine eyes lie to God, while thy breast conceals the devil—away! Grass and flowers must wither where thou hast set thy foot; the birds must hush their notes when thou drawest nigh them. The smoke of the sacred calumet must fly from thee, and may not encircle thee. Thy God is a God of lies, or he would have sent his lightning to strike thee, accursed man! Away!"

"Where is Assowaum?" asked the preacher, in a hoarse tone, without heeding the squaw's violent and menacing words.

"Oh, that he were here to punish thee!" said the latter, passionately, raising herself to her full height; "oh, that he were here to wipe out the shame which thou hast heaped upon the head of his poor wife! But woe to thee!—he will find thee, he will strike thee, his war-cry will sound in thine ear. Oh, thou hast never seen him in his war-paint," she continued, proudly, as she observed the preacher's scornful smile. "Thou hast never seen him with the lifted, flashing tomahawk—with the war-cry upon his lips, and death to his foe in his eye—with the waving scalp-lock and the glittering spear-point; thou hast never seen

him in the war-dance, thou hast never seen him red with the blood of the slain, and with the scalps of his foes at his girdle. But he will come—he will return—"

"When, woman, when?" asked the preacher, quickly, while his hand moved convulsively toward his side.

"When?" cried the squaw, laughing in triumph, "when? Too soon for thee. Before the sun appears twice in the east, he will be here; and woe to thee if his path crosses thine!"

"But where is he now?"

"Ha! coward! thou tremblest already at the thought of his arm—of the sharpness of his weapon. Thou dost quake, and gaze anxiously around, fearing lest he should step from the bushes. I am but a woman, but I do not fear thee."

"Where is he now?" demanded the white man, grinding his teeth, but still not free from fear, for he could not imagine that the squaw had left her wigwam alone, to pass the night here, in this lonely hut, without the protection of her husband.

"Where is he now?" repeated Alapaha, laughing scornfully. "He will not return alone; the Strong Hand is with him that slew him who offended him. Tremble! for thy God will not protect thee."

"Ha!" cried Rawson, while an expression of fiendish joy passed across his features, "he has gone to fetch a comrade! I thought it. Good! Then you are *mine*, and neither God nor the devil shall tear you from me!"

"Away!" screamed the squaw, shrinking from him in terror, as Rawson attempted to clasp her in his arms; and, turning, she fled into the hut. "Away, fiend!—thine eyes glow—away!"

"You are *mine*," cried Rawson, with a savage laugh, as he darted after her, "you are *mine*, and I defy the red-skinned knave—let him come! Nothing shall tear you from me; and I will see to it that your tongue does not betray me!"

"May the Manitou of my people, to whom from this moment I return again, give me strength!" continued Alapaha, tearing herself from the arms of the furious Rawson, and grasping the tomahawk which Assowaum had left with her—"die, wretch, and may the crows and the wolves devour thy carcass—die!"

With these words, she sprung toward the retreating preacher, and the next instant would have sealed his fate; but, her foot struck against the fallen door, she stumbled, fell, and a moment afterward found herself in the power of her enemy.

Alas for her who loves unwisely!

The sequel of her sad life, and the fate which pursued her betrayer and his confederates, will be given in the next issue of this series.

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